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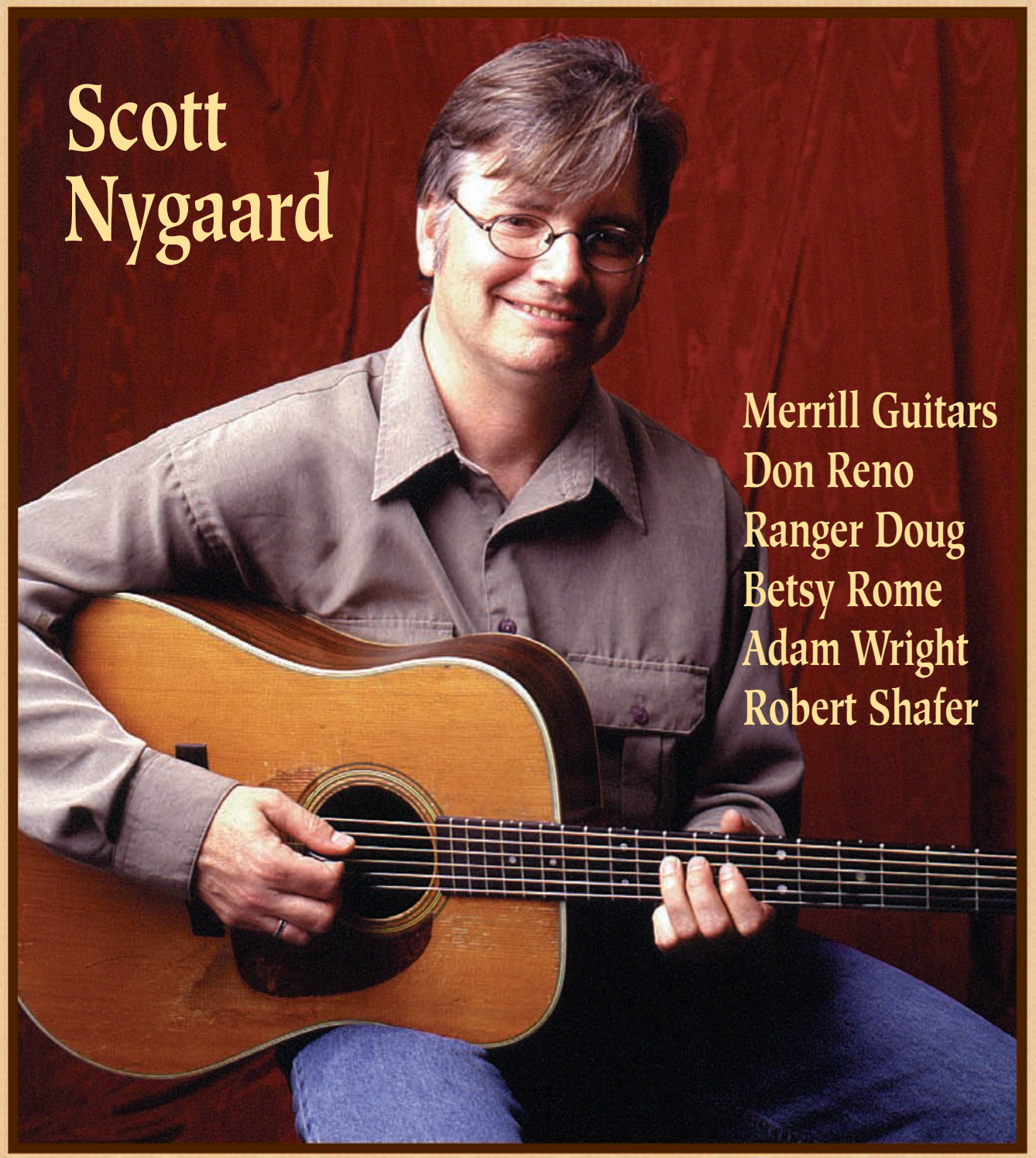
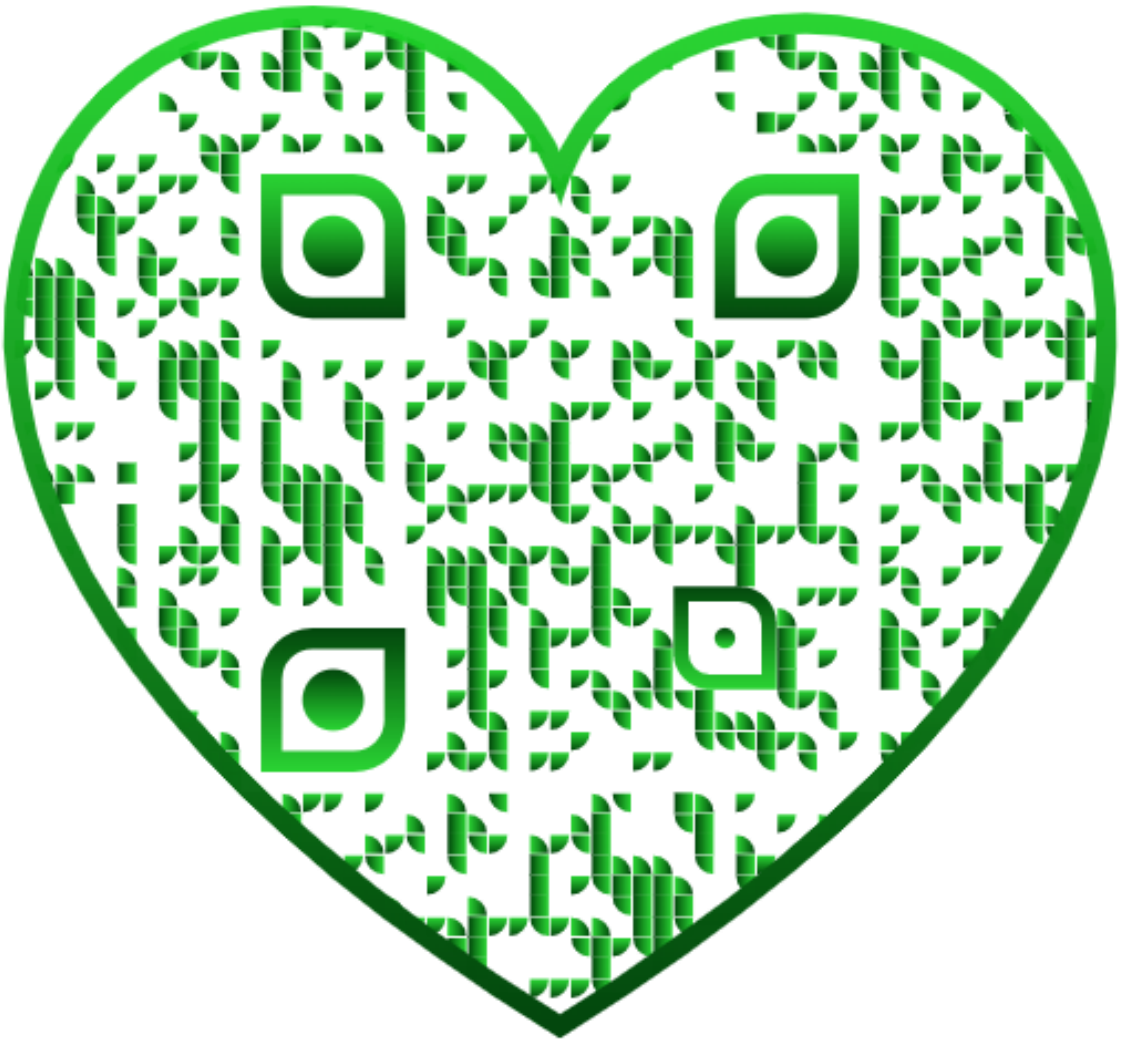
Volume 4, Number 5 July/August 2000





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Cover Photo by Anne Hamersky

How to Duplicate & Promote an Acoustic CD Release

1. **Send your music to radio.** No matter how you define your goals, you need to get your music to folk radio. One excellent way to do this is through a **radio-oriented sampler CD program**, such as the OASISACOUSTIC™ sampler CDs, which get the music of Oasis clients to hundreds of key radio stations throughout the U.S.

2. **Find distribution.** When people hear your music on the radio and want to buy the CD, will they be able to find it? If you make your CD with Oasis, they will. Here's why: Oasis clients automatically qualify for national distribution through Valley Media, the nation's largest full-line distributor. This means your CD is automatically available at all of the biggest Internet music stores: CDnow, Amazon.com, Music Boulevard, TotalE.com, etc. Your CD is also available for special-order distribution in all the big retail chains: Borders, Camelot, etc.

3. **Think "retail-friendly" when packaging your CD.** Your CD needs to look as good as it sounds. While jewel-box packaging is still very popular, as an alternative you may want to consider eye-catching **cardboard substitutes for the jewel box.** such as the patented **Oasis Jewel-Free™ Box**.

4. **Work with a reputable duplication company:**

• **Ask for references.** Who are the company's clients? Do they include artists and labels you respect? (Oasis is proud of our work, for example, with Trout Fishing in America, David Wilcox, Trapezoid, Chris Smither, Brooks Williams, Steven King, Salamander Crossing...)

• **Do they understand your music and your market?** If you're going to Kerrville for the first time, do they understand what this means? If your guitar sounds too tinny, do they know how to fix it? Nerissa Nields (The Nields) says "We love dealing with a company that knows and cares who we are. Oasis is fantastic; they manufactured our CDs in time to make sure we had them for our CD release at the Iron Horse. And the quality is superb."

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EDITOR'S PAGE

Scott Nygaard Issue

Those of you who have been subscribers since our first issue will remember that during our first year of publication Scott Nygaard was one of our regular columnists. Reader feedback indicated that Scott's column was one of the favorites among our subscribers. Unfortunately, when Scott went to work for *Acoustic Guitar Magazine* his busy schedule there did not allow him the time to also work on his column for us and so we could not keep him as a regular contributor.

When Scott called to inform us that he would not be able to keep his column in *Flatpicking Guitar*, I told him that we would be interested in doing a cover story on him at some point in time. With the release of the new Scott Nygaard instructional video by Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop, we felt that the time was ripe for the Scott Nygaard cover. I hope you enjoy reading Scott's story and his ideas about guitar playing and that you have fun working on Scott's version of "Reuben's Train."

Flatpicking Mercantile Catalog Supplement

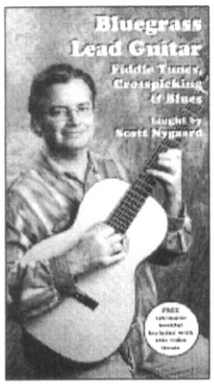
Enclosed with this issue, subscribers will find a summer supplement to our Flatpicking Mercantile Catalog. There has been a lot of great new material to come out since our catalog was published last November. Check out the new stuff and give us a call at 800-413-8296 to order. If you do not have a copy of our catalog or did not get the supplement, call 800-413-8296 and we can get one right out to you.

New Websites

In the last issue I mentioned that we had two new websites that were going to be active by the first of June. One was our online catalog (www.flatpick.com/catalog) and the other was our new website dedicated to helping kids learn how to play acoustic instruments (www.acoustickids.com). Unfortunately, getting these sites up and running has taken us a bit longer than we had anticipated, but keep checking and if they are not up and running by now, they will be up real soon. Thank you for your patience.

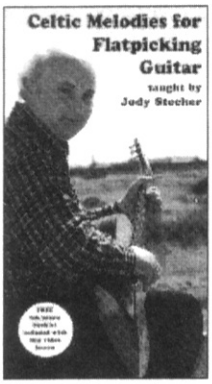
New Releases

Just as we were going to press with this issue I received a couple of CDs in the mail that you all should know about. The fist is the new Crucial Smith CD *Morning Light*. The second is the new Lonesome River Band CD *Talkin'To Myself*. We also received word from Italy that Beppe Gambetta has some new releases with Dan Crary and Carlo Alonzo. Look for those soon.



Bluegrass Lead Guitar
taught by Scott Nygaard

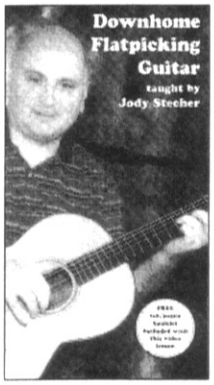
In this video, renowned guitarist Scott Nygaard guides you through the old-time fiddle tune *Little Billy Wilson*, a crosspicking arrangement of *Home Sweet Home*, a melodic solo on the blues song *Trouble in Mind* and shows you how to combine these influences when creating a solo on a bluegrass tune like *East Virginia Blues*. Scott explains in detail the techniques needed to master the bluegrass lead guitar style and the ideas behind his arrangements. All are clearly illustrated in split-screen close-ups. ***GW604 $29.95***



Celtic Melodies for Flatpicking Guitar
taught by Jody Stecher

The colorful tones of the guitar are well suited to the music of Ireland and Scotland. Jody Stecher has developed a unique approach to flatpicking Celtic music drawing on the sounds and techniques of the harp, fiddle and pipes. This video lesson presents a graded course starting with simpler fingering with special attention to picking techniques. Building on a base of a confident and deliberate right hand, more challenging left hand work is gradually introduced.

Titles include: ***Reel*** *Sheehan's Reel •* ***Jig*** *The Connaughtman's Rambles •* ***March*** *A Trip To Mabou Ridge •* ***Strathspey*** *The Devil In The Kitchen •* ***Reel*** *Muilleann Dubh •* ***Reel*** *Doctor Gilbert* ***GW605 $29.95***



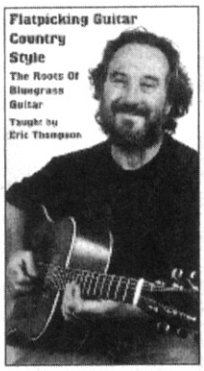
Downhome Flatpicking Guitar
taught by Jody Stecher

Jody Stecher has long been America's least generic flatpicker. This video is both a roadmap of Jody's development as a flatpicking guitarist of mostly American vernacular music, and a guide to how any flatpicker can expand their expressive technique. Think of it as *"Flatpicking According to Jody"*.

It's a graded course starting with basics in which the technical relationship between fingerpicking and flatpicking is made clear. The first few pieces are great songs with memorable melodies but minimal fingering so that right hand fundamentals can be mastered. With each new tune more techniques are introduced and more and more fingerboard is used, both horizontally and vertically. The second half of the video is purely instrumental music and the tunes are more complex.

Titles include: Carter's Blues, It's Hard To Love, I Got A Bulldog, Leake County Blues, Arkansas Traveler, The Dawn and The Ship in Full Sail ***GW606 $29.95***

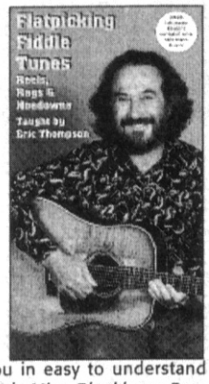
Flatpicking Guitar Country Style
The Roots of Bluegrass Guitar
Taught by Eric Thompson



Eric Thompson will have you flatpicking lead breaks in styles from Maybelle Carter to Doc Watson. You'll learn to pick out the melody to songs like *East Virginia Blues, Sad and Lonesome Day* and *Shady Grove*. You will learn to embellish your playing with "hammer-ons" and "pull-offs" for the real old-time country sound. You'll build a solid technique, advancing step-by-step through single note arrangements of *Thompson's Rag,* fiddle hoedowns *Arkansas Traveler* and *Soldier's Joy,* and a bluesy bluegrass break for *Good Old Mountain Dew* (employing slippery slides and hot runs). Eric's invaluable tips on left hand fingering and right hand pick technique are clearly illustrated in split-screen close-ups.

GW 601 $29.95

Flatpicking Fiddle Tunes
Reels, Rags & Hoedowns
Taught by Eric Thompson



Old-time fiddle tunes are the bedrock upon which acoustic guitar flatpicking is built. Eric Thompson's strong, melodic picking has set a benchmark for taste and tone for nearly four decades. In this video Eric shares soulful arrangements of seven of his favorites, guiding you slowly, line-by-line through classics like *Texas Gals, Fish In The Millpond,* Scottish-Irish rooted *Miller's Reel* and *Stony Point,* mountain modal *Falls of Richmond,* swingin' *Kennedy Rag* and the bouncy *East Tennessee Blues.* You'll build your repertoire and hone your technique, exploring fingering patterns in six different keys which are all clearly illustrated in split-screen close-ups. ***GW 602 $29.95***

Bluegrass Crosspicking Guitar
Taught by Eric Thompson

Crosspicking is an exciting flatpicking technique that is an essential part of every bluegrass guitarist's arsenal. Utilizing repeated patterns on three-string groups, crosspicking captures the bounce of a fiddler's double shuffle and the drive of three-finger banjo Scruggs-style rolls. Eric Thompson lays it out for you in easy to understand steps, illustrating the basic patterns with arrangements of *Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss, Blackberry Rag, Beaumont Rag, Wildwood Flower,* and *Cross-eyed Fiddler.* Split-screen close-ups let you see exactly what and how Eric is playing. ***GW 603 $29.95***

Beginner's Country Guitar
taught by Fred Sokolow

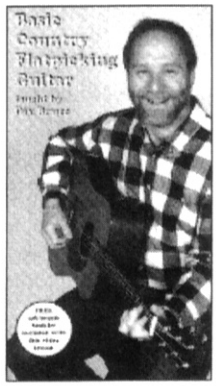
All you need to put over a good country song is your voice and a guitar. This video lesson gives you the tools you need to play old-fashioned country, honky-tonk and country rock. You'll learn how to play: Accompaniment strums for different rhythmic feels; a variety of first-position chords; bass runs; major scales; solos and turnarounds.

Tunes include: Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain, I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry, The Bottle Let Me Down, I'm Movin' On, Will The Circle Be Unbroken, Silver Wings and Jambalaya, ***GW407 $29.95***

Flatpicking Country Classics
taught by Fred Sokolow

In this 75 minute video Fred teaches nine standards every country picker/singer should know... from start to finish. You'll learn an intro for each song, a backup pattern and bass runs to play while singing, an instrumental solo, and an ending. Picking up where his *BEGINNER'S COUNTRY GUITAR* video left off, Fred keeps the arrangements fairly simple but includes a few up-the-neck chord positions and hot licks. You'll learn solos and runs in five different keys. Each song is played at regular speed and then slowed down on a split-screen that gives you a close-up look at the picking hand and the chording hand.

Tunes include: New San Antonio Rose, Wild Side of Life, Waltz Across Texas, The Race is On, Beautiful Kentucky Waltz, That's the Way Love Goes, I Don't Hurt Anymore, Someone I Used To Know and City of New Orleans ***GW410 $29.95***



Basic Country Flatpicking Guitar
taught by Dix Bruce

Hot guitar licks abound these days but simple melodies played along with chord strums on the low strings of the guitar have never lost their appeal. Pioneered in the 1920s by the great Mother Maybelle Carter, this combination of lead and rhythm guitar playing is the foundation upon which all traditional country, folk, bluegrass, and hot flatpicking guitar is based. In this video lesson Dix Bruce carefully teaches lead and backup guitar to nine great and classic country, bluegrass, and folk standards, ballads and hot breakdowns played by musicians the world over.

Tunes include: Worried Man Blues, Lonesome Valley, Storms Are On the Ocean, Handsome Molly, Wildwood Flower, Redwing, John Hardy, Jimmie Brown the Newsboy ***GW308 $29.95***

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Scott Nygaard

Photo: Anne Hamersky

by Dan Miller

The art of flatpicking guitar has come a long way in the past thirty years. In part we can thank the legends like Doc Watson, George Shuffler, Tony Rice, Norman Blake, Russ Barenberg, Larry Sparks, and Dan Crary, who are still out there entertaining audiences and inspiring today's young players. However, we also need to credit the innovators who have appeared on the scene in more recent years to add fresh ideas to the standard "work horse" tunes and provide us with the brand new tunes that we have added to the flatpicking repertoire. Scott Nygaard is someone who stands solidly in this category alongside other great contemporary players like David Grier, Kenny Smith, and Bryan Sutton.

Nygaard started out as a bluegrass and old-time player and then later became a jazz player. He worked hard during his jazz days to not be a "bluegrass player trying to sound like a jazz player." Later he came back to bluegrass and says that he worked equally as hard to not sound like a jazz player who had come over to bluegrass. What he accomplished in that transition was an ability to sound like a natural bluegrass player while taking bluegrass guitar playing to places it had never been before. He is able to fit into the genre but do so with a fluidity, versatility, style, and sophistication that gets people's attention.

Nygaard's work with Laurie Lewis' and Tim O'Brien's bands, his two solo recordings on Rounder, and the studio session work he has done with various West Coast performers displays an incredible versatility. He is equally adept at playing bluegrass, old-time, Cajun, western swing, folk, and/or jazz. He also has the ability to give a tune both a traditional and progressive feel at the same time. It sounds paradoxical, yet he does it.

Since entering the national bluegrass scene in 1989, Scott has inspired flatpickers to push the boundaries of traditional

music, yet not move too far away from tradition and lose the qualities that make traditional music great. When asked to play a traditional tune, Scott may say, "This is my take on it." His "take" is always interesting, inventive, tasteful, and what you might call "tradition with a twist."

Scott grew up in Southern California and began his career in music at the piano when he was seven. In grade school he moved on to play the cello. The acoustic guitar did not enter his life until he was in high school. He got a nylon string guitar for his 14th birthday but said, "I could not quite see how that was going to get me to sound like anything I was hearing on the radio, so it took me a while to get going with it." A bit later Scott started to hang out with people who were playing contemporary folk songs on the acoustic steel string guitar and he would "noodle along with them."

Like many of us, the event that fueled Scott's passion for the guitar was hearing Doc Watson play on the *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* album. He said, "The sound of his guitar blew me away. It was so clear and clean." Scott also began going out to hear live acoustic music at local venues like the Troubadour, McCabe's, and the Cal State Long Beach Coffee House. He said, "I would see the Dillards, Country Gazette, some blues stuff like John Lee Hooker, some singer/songwriters...lots of different stuff. I grew up listening to the radio and rock and roll, which I liked, but seeing the live acoustic shows really got me into the acoustic aspect. I liked the music I was hearing on the radio, but it didn't relate to the instrument that was sitting there in my lap."

Scott bought his first steel string guitar, a Guild D-25, when he was 17. During his senior year in high school he continued to get together with friends who were playing the contemporary singer/songwriter style music. Since Scott wasn't a singer, he would sit in and try to play melodies along with what they were doing. The exposure to acoustic music at local clubs and his experience playing with friends led him to become very focused on music and guitar, so much so that when it was time to go to college, he chose music as his major.

In 1973, Scott graduated high school and left Southern California to attend Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. He says, "It was a fairly alternative college. They had a couple of different music programs and they actually had a guy, Tom Foote, teaching bluegrass. He was a bluegrass banjo player who mostly taught education and journalism at the college but he got hooked up with this music program."

Scott went to college specifically to study music, but due to the relaxed curriculum, he was able to integrate the study of classical ear training and composition with classes on folklore, bluegrass banjo, fiddle, and old-time music. The curriculum was also performance oriented and the school organized various ensembles that Scott was able to participate in. Unfortunately, as Scott's studies progressed, the school began to change the curriculum and Scott became frustrated. He said, "At that point I didn't want to do anything but play my guitar. The third year I was there the curriculum had changed to the point where there wasn't much of a music program any more. So I decided I would just drop out and play my guitar."

Aside from the class learning, ensemble work, and jamming that his college experience offered him, it was also during his time at school in Olympia that Scott was introduced to the playing of Clarence White. Scott said, "When I went to college, right off the bat I met some people who were really into Clarence and had some tapes of the Colonels from the 60s. There were a couple of tapes that I pretty much wore out listening to over and over. I had another friend, Mike Bristow, who was a really good guitar player, who had figured some of Clarence's stuff out. He was more advanced than me, so he would show me stuff and I would figure other stuff out."

After leaving college, Scott began playing with friends and performing old-time music on both fiddle and guitar, playing coffee houses and square dances in and around the Olympia, Washington, area. It was during this time period that Scott also started seriously listening to jazz players like Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian.

Scott moved to Seattle, Washington in 1975 and began playing with a variety of bands there, but admits, "I was still just trying to learn stuff. I wasn't really worried about performing that much." He supplemented his income working part time jobs. While in Olympia and Seattle Scott was never in a bluegrass band because, as he says, "Back then, if you were the guitar player in a bluegrass band, you were the lead singer and I didn't really sing. And being a lead guitar player just wasn't accepted. Even at bluegrass jam sessions it would go around the circle and the breaks would pass from the banjo player on my right to the fiddle player on my left. They would not have considered the fact that I might want to take a break. I realized that it wasn't working for me playing bluegrass so I started doing other things."

Scott spent time in an old-time string band playing both fiddle and guitar. He says that the band, The Hurricane Ridgerunners, was the first he played in that really worked a lot. He also began playing with some singers who were singing swing and jazz music. Regarding his time in Seattle, Scott says, "I was always just in and out of

Photo: Anne Hamersky

Scott Nygaard with Laurie Lewis and Grant Street. 1990

Photo: Anne Hamersky

Scott Nygaard with Tim O'Brien and fellow O'Boy Mark Schatz

different bands. I would be in a band for a year, work up a bunch of stuff and then move on to doing other stuff."

Scott eventually became more interested in playing jazz. He said, "I really liked the first Grisman Quintet record that came out, but I had this idea that if I was going to play jazz, I did not want to sound like a bluegrass guitar player playing jazz. I really wanted to learn it. So when I was twenty-three I took three months and went down and stayed at my Dad's house in Southern California and practiced eight hours a day. I treated it like a job and played my guitar from nine to five."

Scott's eight-hour-a-day practice routine consisted of working with Ted Greene's *Single Note Jazz Soloing* book. He took one page of the book and worked with it all day. The next day, he moved onto the next page. He said, "I would play everything on that page in every position and in every key before I moved onto the next page. I had been reading in magazines about jazz guys saying that they had spent 'three months woodshedding' and it just sounded like the thing you had to do to really learn it—lock yourself in a room and learn the guitar. So that is what I did."

After three months of woodshedding in Southern California, Scott went back to Seattle in about 1980 and focused on jazz. He spent time playing with a few jazz singers in Seattle and a swing band in Bellingham. His guitar of choice for playing acoustic jazz was one built by Richard Raimi of Seattle. Scott says, "It was kind of Dreadnought shaped, but it had fan bracing. It was an odd guitar, but it sounded great for acoustic jazz. It had a Maccaferri sound, but a little sweeter and warmer."

A short time later Scott met his first wife singer/songwriter, Linda Waterfall, married her and began playing with her as a duo. Scott says, "That was pretty cool. She had a very strong classical composition background and I learned a lot about writing music from her. She really encouraged me to write." In addition to his work with Linda, Scott also played in an acoustic jazz band, Wide Awake, with John Miller, Julian Smedley, and Cary Black. The band performed original music that both Scott and John were writing.

Not one to sit still or pigeon-hole himself into one musical style, Scott also began playing with How's Bayou, a Seattle-area Cajun band and delved into the electric guitar world by playing that instrument in country and jazz bands. During this period of time, from 1982 to 1988, Scott worked a full time job during the day and played music at night.

In the summer of 1988, while teaching guitar at the Puget Sound Guitar Workshop, Scott met Alison Brown and the two played a lot of music together. Scott says, "We encouraged each other to break out and play music full time. She was working as a banker in San Francisco. We left Puget Sound both having decided to quit our jobs and play music. A couple months later she was playing in Alison Krauss' band and soon after that Alison told me that Laurie Lewis was looking for a guitar player to make a record. I called Laurie and went down and auditioned. I was hired and recorded *Singing My Troubles Away* with Laurie. After doing one tour with Laurie, filling in for Tony Furtado, I decided to move to California and join Laurie's band."

When Scott had first called Laurie to explain that he was interested in the guitar job, Laurie's only experience with Scott was his work with John Miller in the jazz band. Scott said that Laurie was pretty surprised to hear from him and asked, "Have you ever played bluegrass? Have you ever heard bluegrass?" Scott said, "What was funny was that I went from playing electric guitar in this far out jazz trio, where half the time we were playing free improv, to trying to learn how to play bluegrass rhythm guitar. That was really my job when I went with Laurie's band. She said, 'OK, you can play all of this other stuff, but you have to learn how to play good solid rhythm.' I hadn't been playing rhythm in a bluegrass band situation for a long time."

Scott stayed with Laurie Lewis' band for three years. It was during his time with Laurie that his first solo record, *No Hurry*, was released. Scott explains, "Alison Brown and I had talked about making a record together, but that didn't work out because she had started making her own solo record. I had gotten all of this material together and so I decided to do my own record. Fortunately, Rounder picked it up."

In 1991, Scott left Laurie's band. Just prior to that, Tim O'Brien had called and asked if Scott could tour with him and Mollie in Europe. Scott was not able to make that trip; however, when he left Laurie he called Tim to say that he was now available if Tim ever needed someone to sub for Nick (Tim had already started the O'Boys band with Nick Forster on guitar.) A couple of months later, Nick Forster quit the band and Scott was called to fill in for a three-gig tour. But, Tim did not hire Scott at that time. He ended up hiring Jeff White for the guitar player spot with the O'Boys. However, shortly thereafter Jeff got a job with Vince Gill and Scott moved into the guitar player spot with the O'Boys. He stayed with Tim O'Brien through the fall of 1997. During his time with Tim he recorded with Tim on four projects and released his second solo CD, *Dreamer's Waltz*.

The decision to leave the road in 1997 was due to his desire to stay at home with his then three-year-old son, Joseph, and his wife, Anne Hamersky. Scott obtained a position, which he still holds, as associate editor at *Acoustic Guitar Magazine*. He will soon be moving on to the managing editor position. Although he now sits behind a desk during the day, he has not set his guitar aside. He currently plays in the San Francisco bay area in a band called

the Quirks with Ruthie Dornfeld and Paul Kotapish. He has also been playing his arrangements of traditional old-time and Appalachian music in a duo with singer Chris Webster and has gone on short tours with Salamander Crossing, and the Tony Furtado Band, plus he has played an occasional gig with Peter Rowan. Additionally, he is occasionally called into the studio to play sessions with various West Coast artists.

Scott Nygaard's diverse musical career and unique playing style, combined with his talent as a guitar teacher, have made him a popular instructor at music camps, seminars, and workshops. This has led to a brand new instructional video from Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop which was released in June of 2000. Scott shared some of his ideas about guitar playing with us in the following interview:

Do you recommend that a flatpicker lock themselves away in a room for three months to learn the fingerboard as you did?

You know, I mostly did that to learn jazz. If you are a bluegrass guitar player you don't have to know how to play in B flat at the eleventh fret. But if you want to learn jazz and really learn the fingerboard, that is probably the best way. But if you are 35, you are not going to have the time to do that.

I learned how to play by listening to recordings. I learned the stuff I liked. There are tons of great books and instructional videos out now, but there is one thing that listening to records does and that is educate your ear. An educated ear also allows you to learn stuff from other people at a jam session. I haven't had any teachers, but I learned a lot going to workshops and watching. You learn so much. Last summer I was teaching at the Rockygrass Bluegrass Academy and Del McCoury came to one of the workshops and was just sitting there playing rhythm guitar. Being able to sit that close and watch exactly what he was doing was mind-boggling. I am still amazed.

Have you ever taught students outside of the workshop and camp setting?

Yea, I used to have a fair number of private students although I never did it for a living. I usually ended up with more advanced players.

What do you find that students in bluegrass today have the most trouble with?

They usually have the most trouble with rhythm. There is that kind of undefinable bluegrass groove that is really hard. After all of my years of studying jazz and all of this complicated stuff, when I joined Laurie's band I had to try to figure out how to make that groove work and it wasn't a simple thing. It was really hard. I think the thing that helped me most was watching other people. You know, there is the idea that bluegrass rhythm guitar is "boom-chuck-a." But that is so far off of the track of what is actually going on.

If you listen to Del, he is constantly changing what he is playing. Sometimes he is just playing bass notes. There are times when he is playing booma-chuck-a, and there are bass runs. The whole groove changes depending on what else is going on and who is singing. But people have this sort of simple idea that it is just boom-chuck-boom-chuck. It is so much more complex than that to really get the groove right.

Why do you think people that are playing bluegrass guitar have such a hard time with the rhythm?

They don't try to understand it much past boom-chuck. They need to think about what they are doing and not just space out while they are thrashing away at it.

What do you focus on when you are teaching students how to play lead guitar?

I work with people to try and really get their pick technique down. I recommend totally strict alternating up-down-up-down. If you watch me, I may alter that, but I think that it is important to first get your whole pick technique together. Then you can go and try other things.

Do you work on trying to help students improve their tone and note clarity and those kinds of skills as well?

Yes. But I have noticed that the people who have the best rhythm or have the best tone are those people who think about it all of the time. The people that don't have good tone are those that aren't thinking about it. They are thinking too much about how they can come up with another variation to "Bill Cheatham."

When students come to you to work on their lead playing, have you found that there is any thing in general that they need to work on?

Finding a way to put the melody in their solos. They play too many lick-oriented things. It is hard for students to put the melody into their solos and still make it interesting. A lot of players will just play a modified Carter style if they are going to play the melody. There seem to be two extremes. They either play the melody really simply, or else they go off with their

Photo: Anne Hamersky

The Quirks: Ruthie Dornfeld, Paul Kotapish, and Scott Nygaard

standard licks and lose the melody. I think that the hardest thing is to find a way to combine the two—to play the shape of the melody and still make it interesting.

What do you recommend they do to develop that skill?

I will work with them on crosspicking things and suggest that they keep the melody in mind. You know, every melody has a shape and the way I play is to try and follow the shape of the melody. I may play some long run, but the main melody notes are there. I use the shape of the melody like a map.

When you first got into playing jazz, were you studying Django records and trying to learn his style?

Yea, I would sit down with a record and try to steal stuff. I learned full Django Reinhardt solos and Charlie Christian solos and, later on, Charlie Parker solos and various be-bop things.

Did you ever study with a teacher at all?

No, not on guitar. One thing that my college music education helped with was my ear. I got good ear training. That made it easier for me to pick stuff up off of records.

Can you make any statement about how your jazz playing influenced your bluegrass playing?

When I first started playing bluegrass again I was real cognizant of not trying to sound like a jazz player, or not just throwing in jazz licks. But one thing that I realized I could use from my jazz playing was a jazz harmonic idea that overlays chords on top of other chords. Like putting, say, an A chord over a G chord for a certain sound.

What I realized playing with Laurie, and doing harmony vocal workshops, was that in bluegrass harmony singing frequently you have this vocal trio that is singing a different chord than the chord the band is playing. There are singers that do these suspensions—one chord on top of another. It reminded me of the way jazz players will do the same thing, but in a very different way. So I started looking at that to incorporate it into my playing. I would use these small arpeggios over the main chord. So I would play a little F arpeggio over a G chord or superimpose these other chords to work in a bluegrass way.

Also, there is a way of phrasing that is not strictly phrasing a melody in eight bar lengths. In jazz and be-bop people play across the bar line a lot. I was noticing people like Jerry Douglas and Stuart Duncan doing things kind of like that. And of course Clarence White did that all the time. So I realized that I could get away with that. I started putting odd phrases and pauses in certain places. Also, just the idea of actually putting a breath in there instead of just playing continuous 16th notes. A lot of people say I am a tasteful player because I put pauses or holes in my playing but I don't really think of it like that. It is just sort of a natural thing for me to do. I think those things got ingrained in me from playing jazz.

How did your new video project from Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop come about and how did you decide what you wanted to put on it?

Stefan Grossman and Jody Stecher had talked about doing some more flatpicking videos. Jody had done one himself and he had produced a couple for Eric Thompson. I had actually talked to Stefan about this years ago, but Jody gave me a call more recently about doing this video. What I decided to do was structure it the way I structure my workshops, which is that I break it down into fiddle tunes, crosspicking, and the blues. Those are the elements of playing bluegrass solos. I taught a fiddle tune, I taught a crosspicking tune, I taught a blues tune, and then I taught a solo that I made up to "East Virginia Blues" that incorporated those aspects and some other stylistic things that I do. Jody was real definite about me playing the way I play rather than some generic idea of bluegrass lead guitar.

When you taught the tunes, did you simply present the tune note-for-note, or did you also include conceptual ideas relating to fiddle tunes, crosspicking, and the blues?

On the fiddle tunes I talked about alternating pick direction and how to keep that strict, especially when you put slurs in there. With crosspicking I talked about how to voice the melody. A lot of what I do is keep this roll going, which comes out of crosspicking and is not so much a pattern oriented thing, but it is there a lot of the time. I try to play little snippets of melody and keep open strings going.

Is that one of the defining aspects of your style?

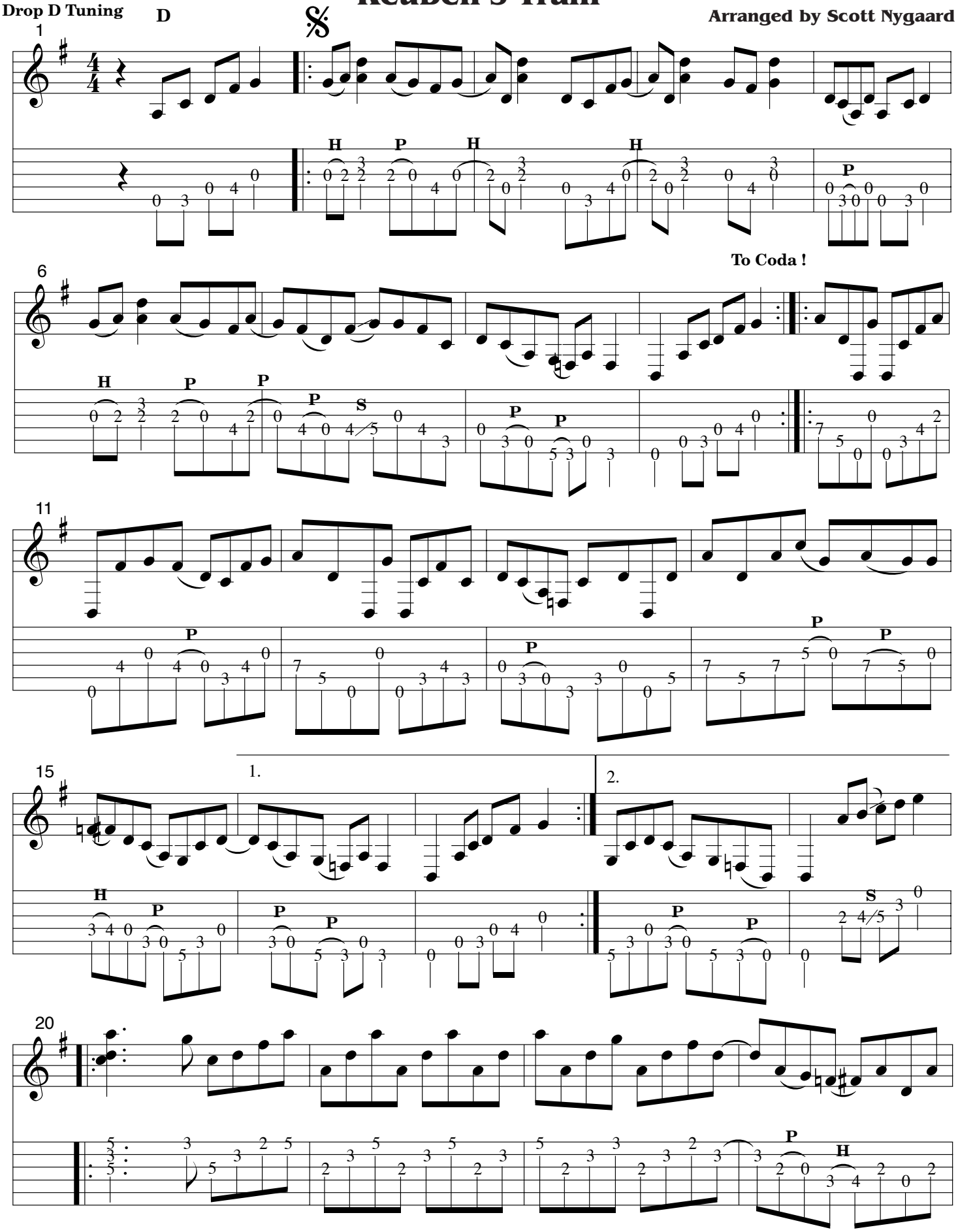
Yea, probably. When I was really trying to learn how to play solos on bluegrass tunes I remember listening to a lot of banjo players. I did not really sit down and try to copy what they were doing, but it was just the idea of how they were playing the melody and putting in all of this other stuff. I wondered how I could do that on the guitar so it was not just a lot of single note lines. I wanted to make it interesting and musical.

Scott's Gear: Scott Nygaard's main axe is a 1956 Martin D-28 that he has owned since 1985. He also owns a Steve Andersen Concert Model that he got in 1990 and uses when he needs to be amplified. His newest guitar is a 00 twelve-fret model Schoenberg, which he says is, "the loudest guitar I own, and it sounds great. It just sings." A few years ago he also bought a Vintage Reissue Martin D-18 to take on the road since he prefers to leave his D-28 at home when traveling. Scott uses D'Addario J-17s on his D-28. He uses a Dunlop thick black "208" pick. His D-28 is equipped with a McIntyre pickup, and he uses a Fishman Rare Earth pickup in his Andersen.

Reuben's Train

Traditional

Drop D Tuning

Arranged by Scott Nygaard

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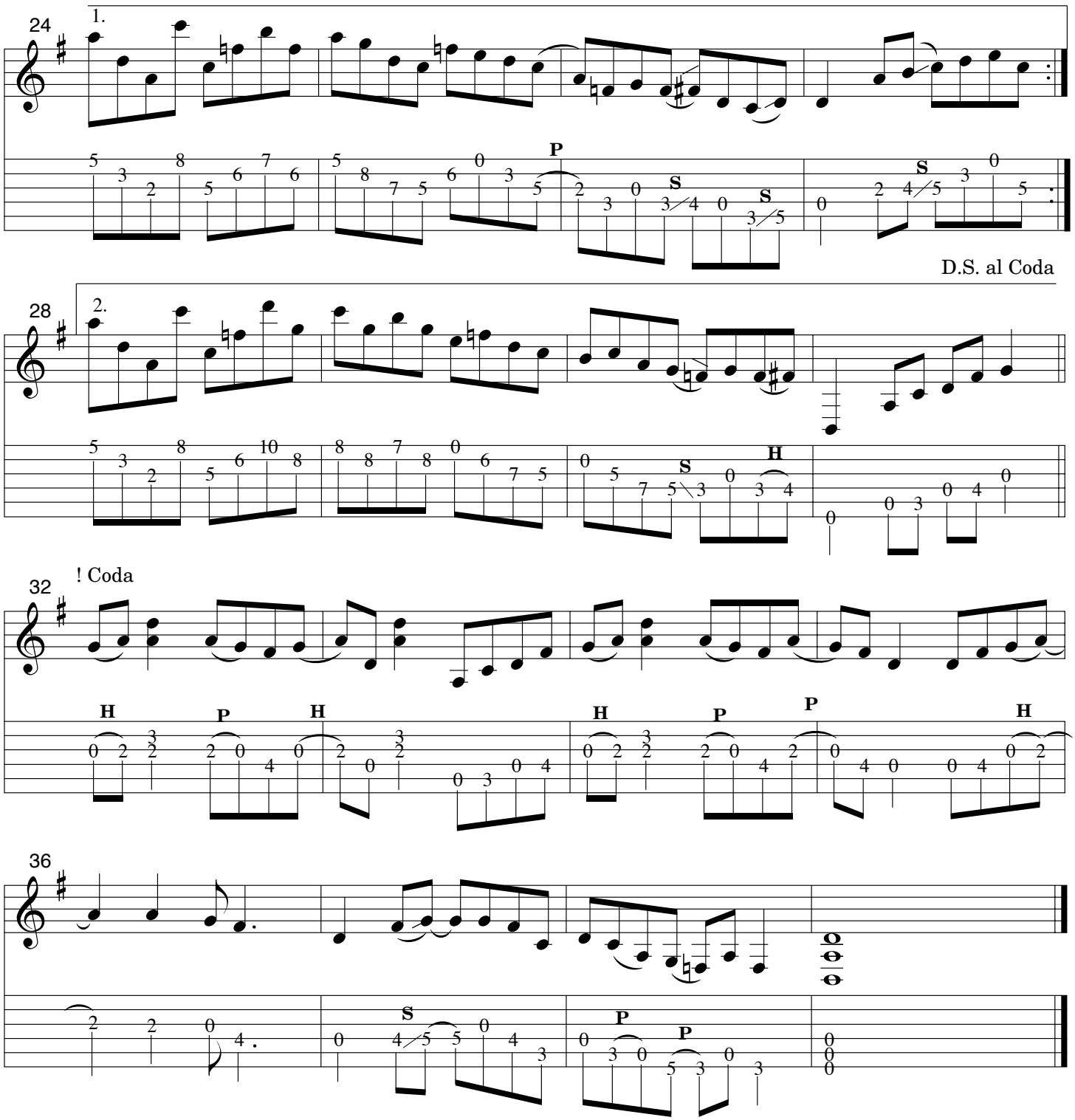
Bonaparte's Retreat

by Craig Vance

"Bonaparte's Retreat" recently found its way into the McKrell's repertoire as a portion of a medley. Our new fiddle player, Sara Milonovich, put a great medley together, and when the medley arrived at this tune, I
perked up. I didn't recognize the two prior tunes, but "Bonaparte's" struck familiarity with me. Years ago I heard this on a Doc Watson album—I believe it was his *Then & Now* recording. I recall loaning it to a friend—it never returned…come to think of it, neither did she. Nevertheless, the version that was on that record stuck in my mind much longer.

We do the medley in open D, but I prefer to play it in C, so that is how I have tabbed it out for you here. The chords are plain and simple, but once you have gotten into the spirit of the tune, it's easy to give it an improvisational twist. Since the tune has only two short sections, consider joining one or two more tunes of this length to arrive at a creative medley.

Don't be surprised when you play this for your friends and they make a comment about the beef commercial ("It's what's for dinner"), because this is the tune they're running in the background.

Use your imagination, I'm sure there's a couple of good jokes in there somewhere.

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Bonaparte's Retreat

Arranged by Craig Vance

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Beginner's Page

by Dan Huckabee

It shouldn't hurt to play rhythm with a fast banjo player...

If you haven't experienced strumming rhythm to a really fast breakdown, you are in for a miserable surprise! If you have, then I don't need to tell you how tedious it can be. Ironically, the harder we try to strum fast, the slower we get. That's because our muscles begin to tense and therefore literally can't perform as fast as they could if they were relaxed. Same with running. I recently discussed this same phenomenon with Carl Lewis' rehab coach, John Bandy. Apparently Carl's remedy was to check his jaw in competition. Carl felt like if his jaw was relaxed, that it was a good barometer for the rest of the muscles in his body. It is common knowledge in the sport of competitive running, that you will go slower if you are tense.

Kind of a catch-22 isn't it? Speed causes tension, but you can't achieve speed when you're tense. Lotta peer pressure there too. Those fast banjo and mandolin players don't particularly appreciate it when you start dragging 'em down, but you can't help it. It is a real snowball effect, but don't feel bad because it's happens to all of us. Let's try to remedy it.

First, no matter who you are or what your individual style is: start dropping your "fancy extras," like up strums, bass runs, and little hammer-on licks, when the pace picks up. In other words: play simpler rhythm. The less you play, the faster you can go.

Next, take that lesson from Carl Lewis and run a check list of the muscle groups that are part of your strumming action: fingers, hand, forearm, upper arm, traps, neck, and yes Carl, even your jaw. Now, when I say check these areas, I mean remind yourself to relax each of them often, throughout the song, whether practicing alone, jamming informally, or playing onstage with your band. Just ask yourself if the muscles in your forearm are relaxed, and then literally let go. Take note that the wrist is a major problem area. Watch a few pros and then a few struggling amateurs and see how their wrists compare. This will give you inspiration and provide a major clue toward solving the problem.

Another important aspect is bracing. Fast rhythm (or even slow rhythm) can't be played if you have a finger or the palm of your hand planted on the guitar. Proper rhythm technique is the result of turning at the elbow in the opposite direction of your wrist. In other words: when your elbow goes down, your wrist goes up, and vice versa, but totally free from bracing. So get yourself a lazy limp wrist with some totally relaxed forearm muscles and you are on your way to fast rhythm.

After you've had a chance to experiment with these new concepts and are getting adjusted to the change in your style, try it out with a metronome. If you try it with a banjo player, he won't allow you the opportunity to get faster gradually. In other words, right at first we want to practice these new techniques slowly. At a slow speed you can relax. Once you've mastered relaxing while playing rhythm slowly, you can start speeding the metronome up one notch at a time. This way, when you realize that you are starting to tense up, you can slow the metronome down a little in order to maintain relaxation. Don't expect to get up to full speed with relaxation on your first day. Your muscles are still in the habit of contracting when a tempo is fast, and you have to introduce "relaxed speed" to them gradually.

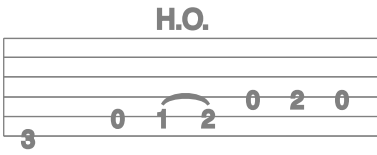
Once you are at the gig, forget about accuracy. If you are concerned about hitting that alternating bass note perfectly every time, you will tense up. Don't think of missing as a mistake. What is more important is sounding smooth. What makes you sound smooth, is being relaxed. The only way to relax, is to not care (if you miss occasionally).

Rhythm guitar is the real unsung hero of bluegrass music. It's not the up-front show off, but it's the most important part of the bluegrass band. Perhaps the audience appreciates the show off lead instruments the most, but the band members appreciate the rhythm guitar player the most. (This is true in professional and recreational bands alike.) I guess it's tough to be the blocker on a football team rather than the touchdown scorer, but blocking sure is necessary and valued. I personally have played my best lead when I've been playing with a great rhythm guitar player. That's because a great rhythm guitar player makes the lead player's job so much easier.

I became a fan of bluegrass rhythm when I first saw Chris Jones playing with Special Consensus around 1982. He reeked of style, but it wasn't a bunch of silly runs. Instead, it was a bunch of tasteful stylistic accents that all happened at certain places in the song and lent definition, drive, punch, and direction to the team. He really knew what he was doing. It was like his guitar was the "musical director" of the band. Everything had a purpose that caused all the band members to play well. It made me want to be a rhythm guitar player rather than a lead player.

Ever since that day, I've consciously tried to develop some of his little signature concepts and finally I just decided to call him and ask him to develop a video on all that stuff that he's been doing all these years. He said he'd been planning to call me because he'd already been developing it at home, and performing it at his seminars, workshops, and training camps. Well, we did it, and have it available today, so if you are interested in truly proper, elegant, authentic bluegrass rhythm, give us a call: Musicians Workshop 800-543-6125 and ask for *The Art of Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar* by Chris Jones. You won't be disappointed.

Flatpick Rhythm Guitar



by Joe Carr

Josh White and Simulating Fingerpicking Rhythm with a Flatpick

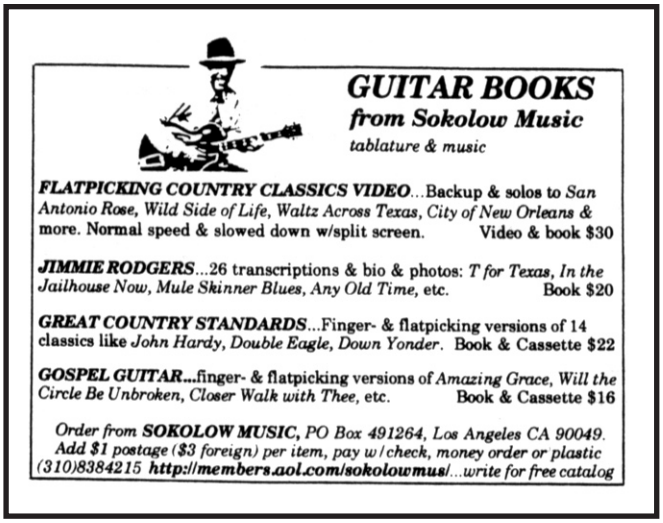
My family had an odd collection of records when I was a child. I don't even know who bought these records, but included were diverse artists such as Frank Sinatra, Harry Belafonte and blues singer Josh White. One side of the Josh White album was devoted to the story of John Henry and the other side included "Saint James Infirmary" and "Black Girl" which is also known as "In the Pines." While the melody is similar, the tempo and chord changes differ from the common country versions of this tune.

Josh White has been called "the artist most responsible for introducing black folk, blues and spiritual music to white America and the rest of the world." Born in Greenville, South Carolina in 1915, his difficult youth included years of apprenticeship leading blind black blues singers including Blind Lemon Jefferson and Blind Blake. In addition to walking these singers, he would dance, sing, play tambourine and collect coins at performances. His own solo record career began in 1932 and continued nearly until his death in 1969. Among his accomplishments: first black artist to give a command performance at the White House (1941), the first to earn a million selling record ("One Meatball," 1944), and the first to make a solo concert tour of the U.S. (1945). In 1988, the U.S. Postal Service issued a Josh White 32 cent stamp, followed by a Smithsonian Institution Tribute Concert featuring Josh White Jr., a noted performer in his own right.

White accompanied himself on fingerstyle acoustic guitar, a sound I found very attractive. The rhythm pattern on "Black Girl" was used both as a solo break and for accompaniment behind White's vocals. It was the first guitar arrangement I ever tried to work out from listening to a record. The A7 chord used throughout has a characteristic sound which I thought I recognized. I was already playing that form of A7 and for the first time, I recognized a sound on a record and I felt fairly confident that I knew where on the guitar I could duplicate this sound. Those of you who have tried to transcribe guitar music from recordings realize how essential this one skill is.

Below is my recollection of White's arrangement. It is quite slow and flatpickers should have no trouble playing it, even though this is White's fingerstyle arrangement. I generally use downstrokes only. Note the pre-bend and release in measure 7. Fret the B note at the second fret of the 5th string and bend the note up one half step to the pitch of the third fret (C). With the string bent, strike the note and release until the pitch falls to the B note.

Surprise your picking friends with this unique arrangement of an old standard.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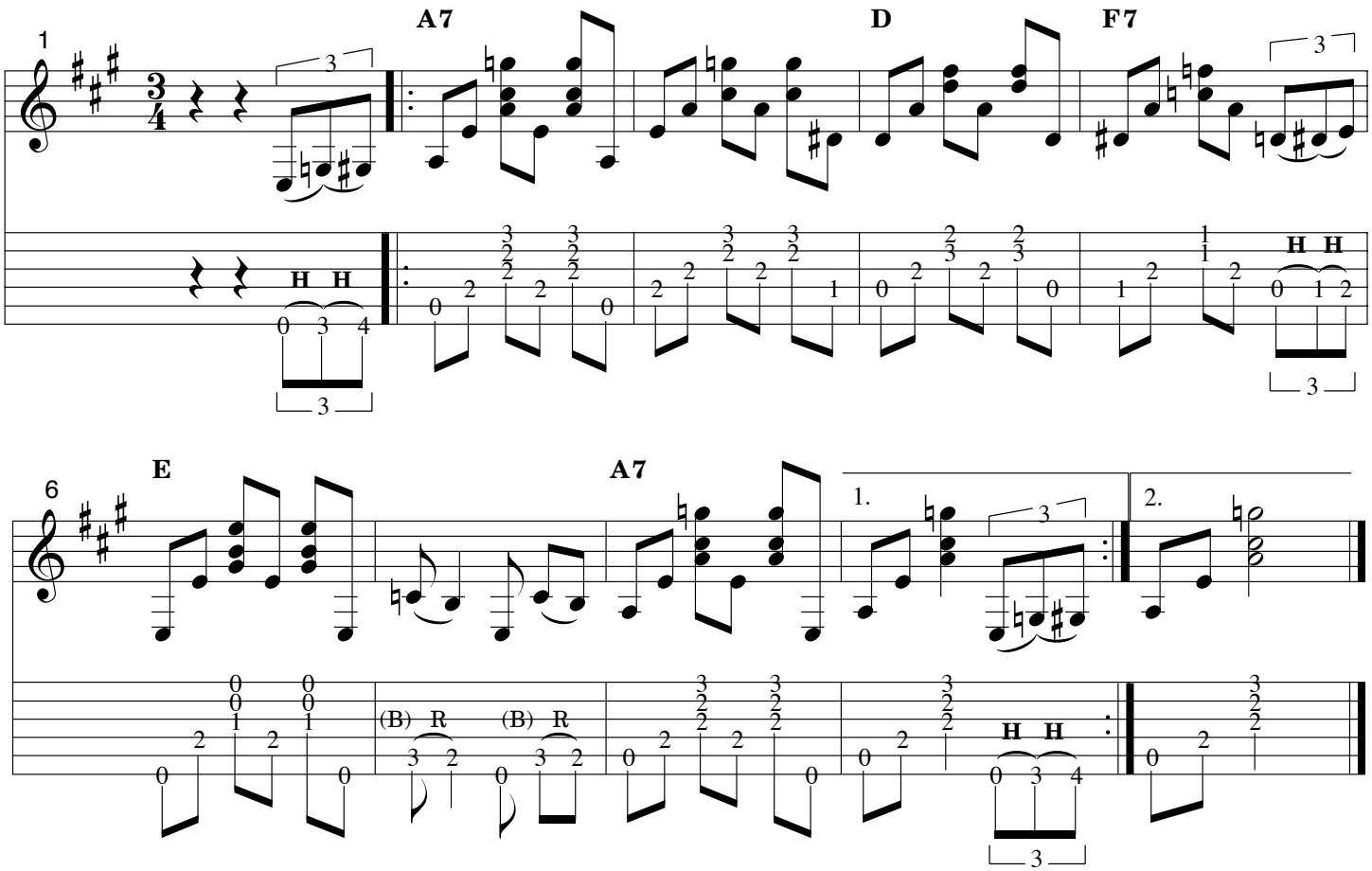
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Flatpick Profile:
Betsy Rome

by Dan Miller

When we first began publishing *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, I received an email from a woman who asked, "This isn't going to be another boy's club, is it?" My response was, "No, we would like to highlight women flatpickers as well as male flatpickers." The problem we have encountered is that women who specialize in flatpicking guitar are not very easy to find. During our continual search for women flatpickers, the name Betsy Rome popped up numerous times. When I was finally able to contact Betsy and set up the interview, she reminded me that she was the person who had sent me that email several years ago. So I asked her, "Why aren't there more women in flatpicking?" Her reply was, "I have thought about it, and I just don't know. I try to be as supportive as possible, getting more women involved in this music because I love it, and I think it is something women can do. We just need some role models."

Comments from guitarists who have had the opportunity to pick with Betsy are proof that she is a women who can definitely flatpick. Rolly Brown, a well-known fingerstyle and flatpicking player in the New Jersey/Pennsylvania region, and a popular instructor at Steve Kaufman's flatpicking camp, wrote (*Women In Bluegrass*, Issue 21, December 1999), "Not only is Betsy a versatile and tasty rhythm and lead guitar player in the bluegrass and swing genres, but she brings to the table something which is often missing in the playing of more testosterone-based lifeforms. Dare I call it taste? I think 'musicality' might be more accurate. As a rhythm player, Betsy is a pleasure to play over because she combines strong forward drive with a light mobility. This kind of groove is very exciting to share. As a lead player, Betsy just doesn't seem to be happy unless she's making some kind of interesting statement. Many players produce a non-stop string of eighth notes; a sort of acoustic wall of sound, out of which may arise the occasional ear-catching lick. Betsy seems unwilling to include much of this fodder, and manages to speak economically without losing the rhythmic continuity and drive which distinguishes Bluegrass flatpicking."

On a trip to California, Betsy had the opportunity to pick with our columnist Steve Pottier and sit in with his band, the Avocado Brothers. When asked to comment about Betsy's playing, Steve said, "It stood out in my mind how strong her hands were. Her playing was real strong. She played real bluesy stuff and was fearless when it came to improvisation. She would go out on a limb with a saw! And she is a real good rhythm guitar player in the band context. All in all, I thought she was a real good player."

Betsy Rome told us that she has been involved in music since childhood and admits, "Ever since watching the Beatles when I was in fourth grade, I always wanted to be in a band." She started taking violin lessons in grade school, but switched to guitar in eighth grade. Her first guitar experience came at age thirteen when she began stealing her brother's electric guitar out of his room when he wasn't looking. She says, "In my family, music—at least rock music—was more tolerated than supported. My parents would say, 'Put that (bleep) guitar down and go do the dishes.' That reverse psychology worked for me!" Her brother Michael later became a bass player and broadcast/recording engineer.

Betsy worked an entire summer as a camp counselor to save enough money to buy a $45 JCPenny nylon string folk guitar. She quickly began learning how to play and sing the late sixties acoustic rock music she heard on the radio—Crosby, Stills and Nash and Joni Mitchell being a couple of her favorites. Regarding her introduction to flatpicking guitar, Betsy said, "I met a friend who played the *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* album for me. I had heard about this legendary blind guitar player named Doc Watson who could hit false harmonics." In 1972 she bought a 1961 Martin D-18, her primary instrument for many years, which she still owns and plays.

Betsy graduated from high school in 1972, went to college in Phoenix for a couple of years and then moved to Tucson to attend the University of Arizona in 1974. Tucson had a thriving acoustic music scene in the mid-seventies, and she had the opportunity to meet other pickers and attend concerts on a regular basis. She says, "After being at the U of A for only two weeks, I discovered this coffee house, The Cup, only a few blocks away from my dorm. It was an incredible scene with all of these people hanging out and playing banjos and singing harmonies, and I just had to get involved."

Betsy explains that the Tucson coffee house scene was a mixed bag of traditional music. In the jam sessions, musicians would play old-time, bluegrass, folk, blues, Irish, and western swing tunes without really distinguishing between the musical styles. She says, "When I first learned this music, I didn't know the difference between the different styles. It was all just traditional music to me. But I learned, and gradually became aware that what I really liked best was bluegrass."

A lefty who plays right-handed, Betsy says that she "cut her teeth" on fiddle tunes by backing up fiddlers at fiddle contests and playing rhythm guitar at square dances.

She explains, "I think I was better able to learn the character of the tunes by playing rhythm for them over and over again. After you have done that, you can then start to come up with your own version." In 1976 she won first place in backup guitar at a local fiddle contest, and then in 1980 she took home the coveted "Best Accompanist" prize at the Arizona State Fiddler's Contest in Payson, Arizona. "I'm especially proud of that because the fiddle contestants themselves vote on the accompanist award," said Betsy.

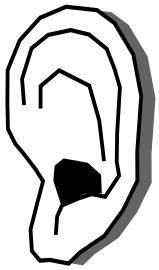
When asked to talk about her rhythm style, Betsy commented, "I am not a purist in any way. I will unabashedly mix back-up styles together. My back-up style is really a combination between a bluegrass open strum and a western swing closed strum, and even an occasional Celtic-type open ringing chord. I like to punch up the rhythm a little bit here and there and keep it alive, as opposed to being a real steady-as-a-rock, even type of player. It's just more interesting to me that way. I love to play rhythm. For a guitar player, that is really the job description. You play rhythm 90% of the time and you play lead 10% of the time."

One of Betsy's earliest influences for flatpicking lead guitar was Dave Luckow, the guitarist in the hot Tucson band the Summerdog Bluegrass Band & Mariachi Ensemble, the group where Tom Rozum (mandolinist with Laurie Lewis) got his start. One evening at The Cup, Betsy asked Luckow to sit down with her and show her how to flatpick. She says, "He just rips off 'Salt Creek' at 300 BPM! I figured I would have to start a little slower than that." One thing Dave did teach Betsy was that the best way to learn a fiddle tune is to go back and listen to the fiddler, rather than learn from the guitar version. Other guitarists who have influenced Betsy over the years include David Bromberg, Clarence White, Norman Blake, Doc Watson, Dan Crary, Tony Rice, and Charles Sawtelle, as well as local (Thatcher, Arizona) guitar whiz Martha Jennings.

Betsy's first professional job was a summer gig in 1975 playing electric guitar in an all-girl top 40 country and rock touring band, Connie Kelly and the Sunshine Girls. She played a borrowed hollow-body Guild electric and says, "We played to a bunch of drunks every night in bar rooms with woodchip floors. We must have played 'Proud Mary' three times a night." She continues, "That was a good learning experience. Here I had been going to this coffee house that year playing traditional music, and when I went out on the road that summer, playing pop music again, I realized that my heart was really in bluegrass."

Betsy has never learned from tab or written music. She said that everything she has learned on guitar has come from either figuring it out for herself or asking other players to show her what they were doing. "Most of what I do is just get the tune in my mind and then sit down and work it out. When I started, there were not a lot of learning materials out and I didn't even own a turntable." Later, when she finally bought a stereo, a friend recommended that she "go get something by Clarence White." She remembers, "I had never heard of him, but I found the *Live In Sweden* album, which had just been released. I put that on the turntable and it just blasted me. Ever since then I have been a huge Clarence White fan and have felt a strong connection to his music." Betsy mentioned that what she likes most about Clarence's style is his timing and the way he "colors" the music by doing more with it than just maintaining the rhythm or stating the melody.

EAR TRAINING: LEVEL 1



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While in college, Betsy also took up the mandolin and the fiddle. After graduating with a degree in graphic design in 1977, Betsy played in several local bands, playing bluegrass, old-time music and Irish Ceili music. In 1981 she won the flatpicking guitar contest in Willcox, Arizona, and placed second in the flatpicking contest in Wickenburg, Arizona. In 1982 she placed second in the flatpicking contest in Payson, Arizona and went on to compete in the National Flatpicking Championship in Winfield, Kansas. Of the forty contestants at Winfield that year, Betsy was the only woman.

1982 was also the year that Betsy moved from Arizona to Mason, New Hampshire. She jumped right into the local New England music scene and played with several Bluegrass/old-time configurations before starting the all-female bluegrass band Sassygrass in 1988. The band placed well in a number of band contests, including winning the first Northeast Regional Pizza Hut International Bluegrass Showdown, attracting national attention. Betsy moved to her current home in Woodbury, Connecticut in 1991, and continued playing with Sassygrass until its breakup in 1993.

Betsy got married in 1986, and that year she bought what was to become her main guitar: a 1985 Santa Cruz Brazilian Tony Rice model. She also owns a 1970's Mossman Flint Hills guitar, a Nugget A-model mandolin, a Fender Squier Telecaster, and a 1930's parlor guitar.

Betsy feels that her role in a band is primarily as a team player. She says, "I am not a person who prefers just sitting and playing guitar alone. To me, music is a positive social interaction. There are things that I am good at as a rhythm player, lead player, or singer, and it's like I'm a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. What's really great is to take different players, who are like other pieces of the puzzle, and put people together until the puzzle becomes whole, and hear what it sounds like. In bluegrass, the vocal harmony structure is first and foremost. Then you have the rhythm section, which needs a bass and a guitar." Betsy has often played in duet and trio configurations. "In a duet, I cover the parts of the bass and the mandolin chop, as well as backup and lead guitar."

Those who have heard Betsy play have commented that they felt she was a very tasteful guitarist. Regarding that comment, Betsy said, "There has been a lot of talk about how a person's limitations can help create their style. I have never been a very fast player. There are some people who can play really fast and clean, and that is their calling card. I've always felt that the spaces should speak as much as the music. It shouldn't be just a constant barrage of sixteenth notes. Sometimes in a jam session, you can use rests to your advantage, by hanging on a note long enough to think of the next note you want to play. It's thinking on your feet, and it helps if you can breathe in between."

One hallmark of Betsy's style is her occasional addition of fingerpicked notes in her lead playing. Similar to Clarence White's approach, it's not really a fingerpicking style but rather an enhancement to flatpicking, changing tonality and varying attack, especially when crosspicking and sliding notes.

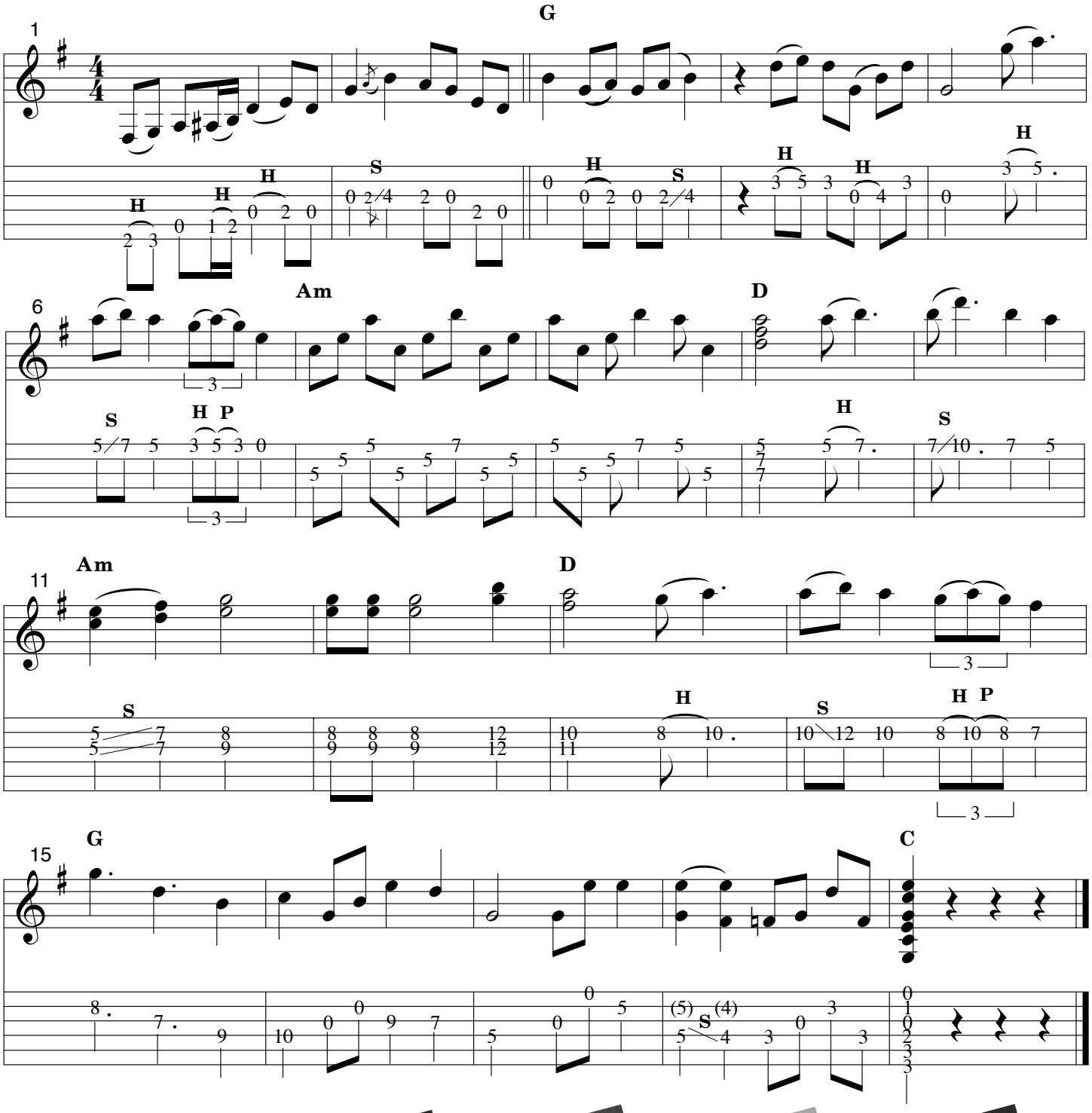
Much of Betsy's guitar work is improvised and her approach to playing is based primarily on feel. She says, "I don't typically memorize the notes; I memorize the feel. If it needs to have a certain feel at a given point in the song, then my natural response is to punch up the rhythm somewhere or play a fill that gives it a certain flavor. That's really how I decide what to play." Betsy adds, "Technique is not as important as finding the soul of the music and having fun with it. Anything else and you might has well be chopping wood."

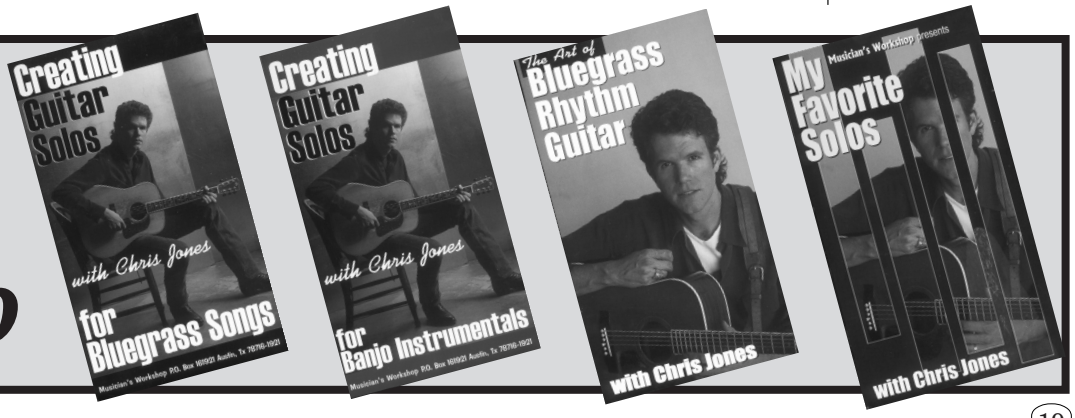
In 1995, Betsy joined with banjo player, singer and songwriter Joan Harrison and formed the band Too Blue. This musical partnership is still going strong today, and performs regularly in western Connecticut /eastern New York with Jack Murphy on upright bass and Betsy's husband Bob Boerstler as sound man.

"It's really important for a woman in this music to have a supportive family. My husband Bob and my son Al are always encouraging me. It's a balancing act for anyone with a career and a family to play music." Betsy continues to be active as a freelance graphic designer, as well as occasionally playing mandolin in the Walkingwood Mandolin Quartet.

Too Blue has plans to release a CD in the near future, featuring their original swing-influenced bluegrass. On the following page we have transcribed Betsy's guitar solo from one of her original songs, "Morning Dew," performed by Too Blue on the *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* audio CD that accompanies this issue.

Morning Dew

Written by Betsy Rome

Chris Jones on Video


Creating Guitar Solos with Chris Jones for Bluegrass Songs
Creating Guitar Solos with Chris Jones for Banjo Instrumentals
The Art of Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar with Chris Jones
Musician's Workshop presents My Favorite Solos with Chris Jones

Guitar Maintenance and Repair

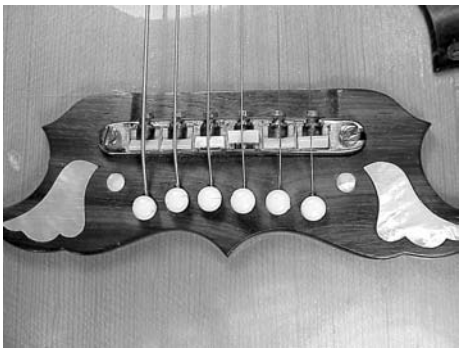
by Frank Ford

Lowering Action at the Saddle as low as possible Without Buzzing.

That's the general request by most of us musicians, who really don't want to be working harder than necessary to mash the strings down to the frets. After all, we're repeating those left hand maneuvers over and over, sometimes hours at a time. A few thousandths of an inch can spell the difference between success and tendonitis.

One of the biggest problems in setting up your guitar is that there are no really concrete measurements. Sure, there are factory standards, but those can't take into account that we all differ in our needs. The way you hold a pick, the volume at which you play, the scale length, the gauge of strings, and many other factors influence the performance of your guitar. So, at least to some extent, it would be advantageous if you could make adjustments in action yourself, so you wouldn't have to take your guitar to the shop for small incremental changes.

In years past, there have been attempts to produce an adjustable bridge, but these efforts have always resulted in a less than satisfactory sound. The most memorable of these were made by Gibson:



While most of the adjustable bridges weren't as clunky as this Dove's Tune-A-Matic bridge, they all impaired tone more than we were willing to tolerate. So much for user-friendly action adjustments.

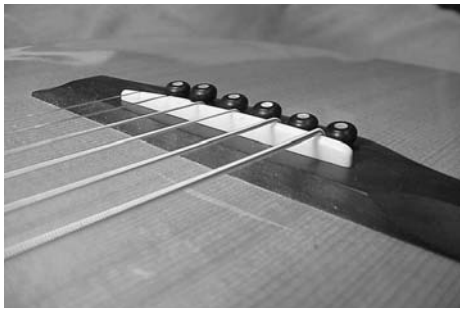
But, if you are stout of heart and at all mechanically inclined, you can make some of your own action adjustments without getting into too much trouble. If your guitar has a pickup with an element under the saddle, you might want to reconsider making your own adjustments. It is relatively easy to mess up the saddle-to-pickup contact and/or damage the element itself.

As I write this article, I'm assuming you have read over some of my earlier pieces on truss rod adjustment, bridge and saddle configuration, and neck angle diagnosis. If it seems as though I've assumed too much, don't forget to gaze through some of these articles at www.frets.com, where I've covered them in detail.

Presuming the truss rod is set correctly, and that the action at the nut is acceptable, virtually all action adjustments are made at the saddle. (The truss rod does affect playing action, but it is not there for adjusting action. Once set correctly, it is unlikely to need changing.)

As guitars age, the action generally rises. The top bows upward, the upper "shoulders" rotate forward a tiny bit, allowing the neck to pull up a bit. That's why most of the time, adjusting action means lowering action.

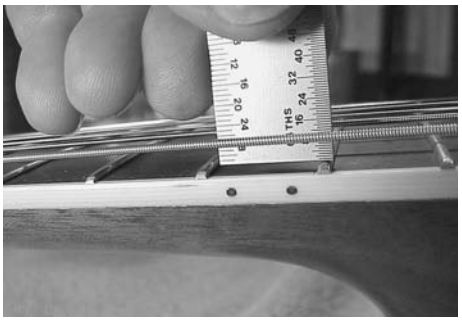
If your bridge is healthy like this one, and has a reasonably tall saddle, you can lower the action safely without incident:



If there's very little saddle sticking up above the surface of the bridge, you may need to consider whether it's time to reset the neck or whether it makes sense to cut the wooden part of the bridge lower in addition to lowering the saddle.

I hope I've gotten all the "caveats" out of the way by now. Here's a general procedure for lowering the action on an otherwise healthy guitar. This instrument, by the way, is a Santa Cruz model H.

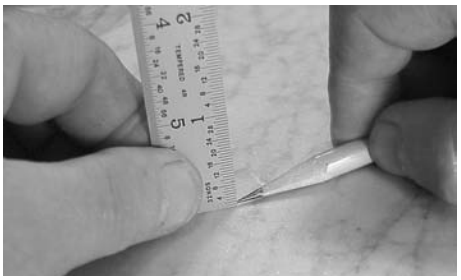
As you can see, the action measures a stout 8/64" at the twelfth fret, measuring the space between the bottom of the string and the top of the fret:



As a rule, I try to work with 1/64" increments when adjusting the action. In this case, I'd like to lower the action to 7/64."

If the action is to go down 1/64" at the twelfth fret, then I must lower the saddle by 1/32." A simple piece of trigonometry leftover from high school!

I'll take the strings off, and grip the saddle with a pair of pliers, and remove it. Then, going over to my flat surface (here, a piece of marble tile; at home, a countertop) I'll hold a sharp pencil right up to my rule at the 1/32" mark:



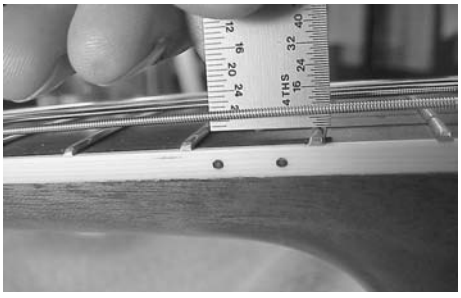
Keeping the pencil steady, I'll simply rub the saddle against the point, giving me a perfect line at exactly the height I want:

Nice little line, neat as you please:

Then I'll sand the saddle from the bottom by rubbing it on a piece of 150 grit sandpaper held down to the flat surface:

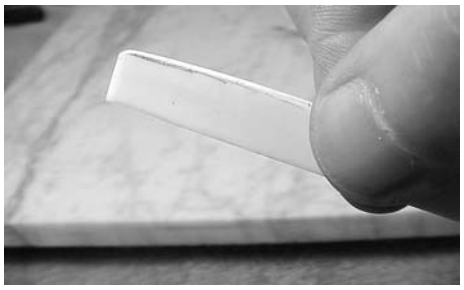
That's it. As soon as my line is sanded away, I can replace the saddle.

And, my action will be right at 7/64."



Now, the action under the first string coincidentally needs to be lowered by just the same amount, so my measurement was easy. If I wanted to lower the action more under the bass than the treble, I'd have drawn my line at the appropriate angle.

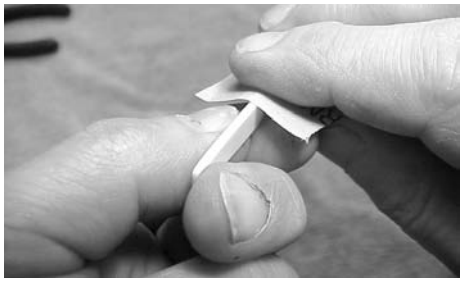
If I wanted to lower the action differentially, or if my saddle were notched or otherwise damaged on top, I'd lower it from the top. I could use the same marking technique, or I could plot a new curve "by eye" to approximately the dimensions I think might work best:



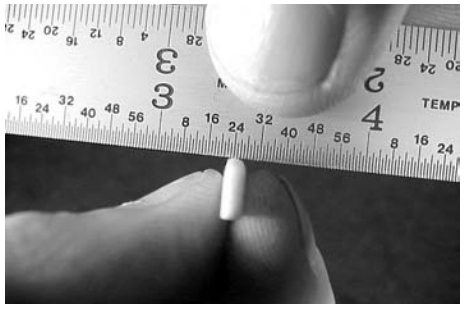
Then I'd sand the top of the saddle to the line:

And recreate the radius or rounded top edge by rocking the saddle from side to side as I sand:

I'd finish up with some 320 grit sandpaper to further round and smooth the top edge to get a good bearing surface for the strings:



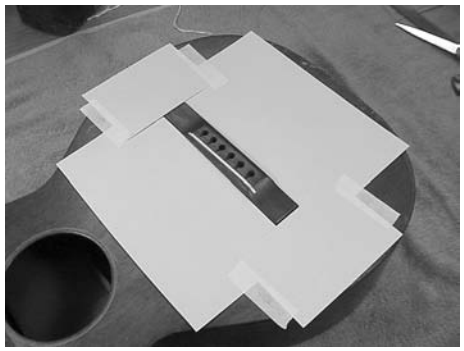
If I hold the saddle up to a straightedge, I can see my progress in rounding over the top:



If I go too far in lowering my saddle, I can shim it back up with little slips of wood veneer. I'd much rather make a new saddle rather than shim the old one both for tonal and structural reasons. Next time, I'll run through the procedure for making a new saddle.

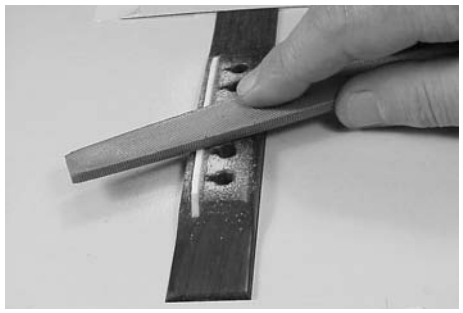
Some guitars present special difficulties. An older Martin may have a "through-cut" saddle which is glued in place. It's no mean trick to remove one of these saddles, which are often destroyed in the process. Likewise, it's a pain to make a new one, and messy to shim an old one.

Here, I'll work on the saddle without removing it:



I have the top of the guitar protected with some heavy card stock paper taped lightly in place.

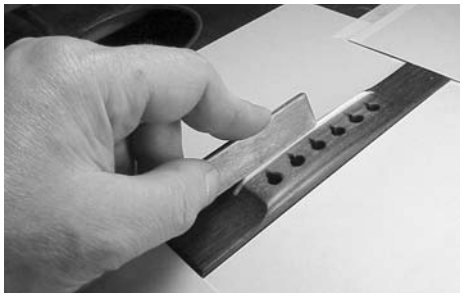
I'm using a double cut file to grind the top of the saddle lower, leaving it flat on top:



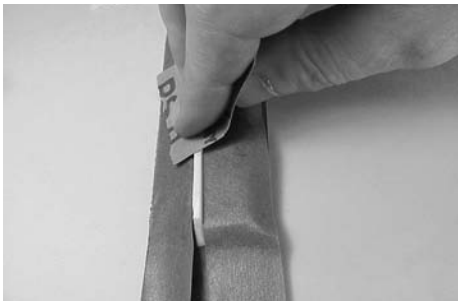
This is a fret file:

I find it the ideal tool for rounding over saddles.

I can works safely on the bridge, and I can produce an ideal radius on the saddle:



Then, protecting the bridge with some masking tape, I can smooth the saddle with some 320 grit sandpaper:



I don't know any guitar mechanics who like working with glued-in saddles. There's always the risk that you'll need to raise the saddle later, and that's a lot of work, what with getting the old one out safely, making and gluing in the new one.

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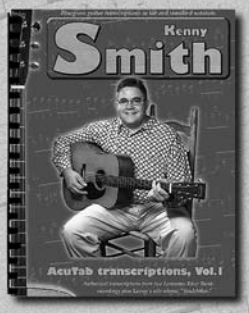

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Flatpicking & Folk/Acoustic Rock

by John Tindel

The Two of Us Get Back

In this complex, fast paced world we are often barraged with more data than our reeling, overwrought and overworked brains care to assimilate. If we just "pay attention"(heard in your mother's voice), however, one never knows when that elusive nugget of truth will shine out from the most innocuous of surroundings. Like spotting, for instance, in the midst of a hectic day, a bumper sticker that simply states, "Breathe...You're Alive." Or this next statement, taken from a lowly comic strip: "Playing an instrument is like falling in love; it's only when you're committed to the relationship that you're willing to do the work." How true, how true. Like any other relationship, or even a computer, we only get out what we put in.

Part of the work, and the fun, of a relationship with the guitar is the learning curve, that act of absorbing something different from what you've played before, whether it be a new song, scale, picking technique or tuning. You must have figured that out or you wouldn't be perusing this magazine right now, which just happens to be chock full of nifty stuff to learn on the guitar. After all, forming new connections between brain cells is what it's all about, right? Especially when you learn, as I did recently, that the synapses in the brain that are formed and reinforced when we learn to play and practice something actually separate and shrink back away from each other if the previously learned task isn't performed often enough. Sort of gives new meaning to the old saying. "Use it or lose it," doesn't it? So, by all means, let's get to it.

I recently worked up a couple of much-loved Beatles tunes that happen to be in close enough tempo and key signatures to run together in a segue or mini-medeley of sorts. Or, more accurately, about 2/3s of' "Get Back" sandwiched between thick slices of the "Two of Us." These two songs work really well going into each other and I always enjoy seeing folks smile when they realize what we've done in combining them.

I've tabbed out the beginning guitar riff and a solo section for "Two of Us" and the fills and solos for "Get Back." I play this as a duo with my partner playing out of an un-capoed E major, so I play it capoed 2nd fret out of D to avoid doubling his parts. So play the examples with the capo on the 2nd fret, unless you want to lower it a whole step to D. But learn it capoed so that the tabulature fret indications match up.

In example 2, fret a D chord with your 2nd and 3rd fingers on the 2nd and 3rd strings while playing the notes of the solo with your 1st and 4th fingers on the D string. Listen to the companion CD (you do have a copy, don't you?) to hear the cross-picked, rolling pattern this allows.

We insert this solo after the bridge, which is such an elegant joining of chords, melody and lyric that we play it again after the solo, for good measure. Then go to the chorus again, at the end of which you can morph onto the intro to "Get Back," do a couple of verses, choruses and the solo from that, then back for the last verse and chorus of the "Two of Us."

Enjoy these good ol' Lennon and McCartney classics, and remember, for maximum pleasure, commit to the relationship and accept the work.

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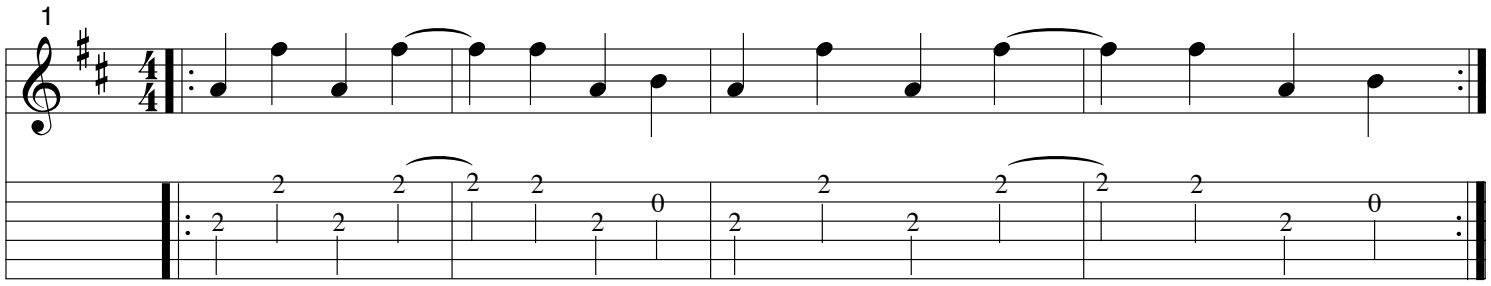
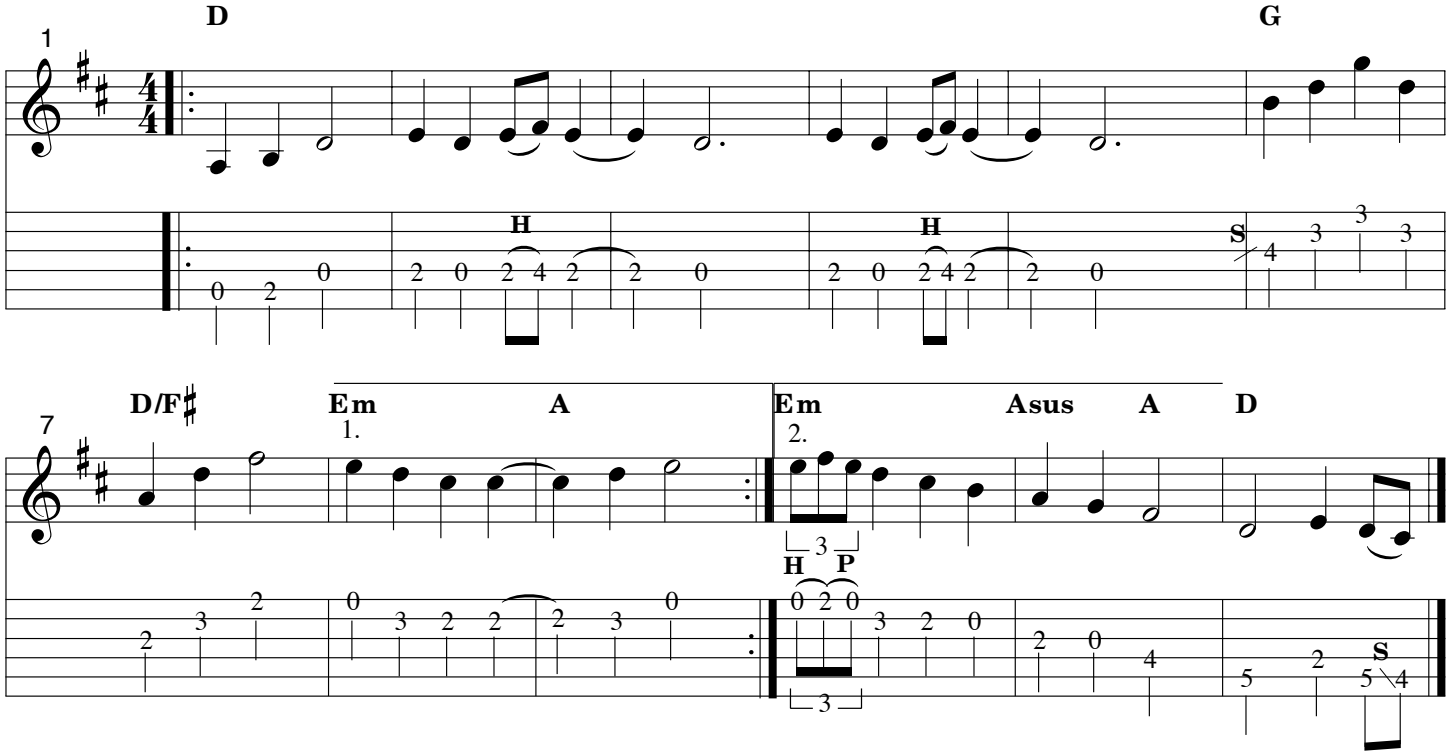
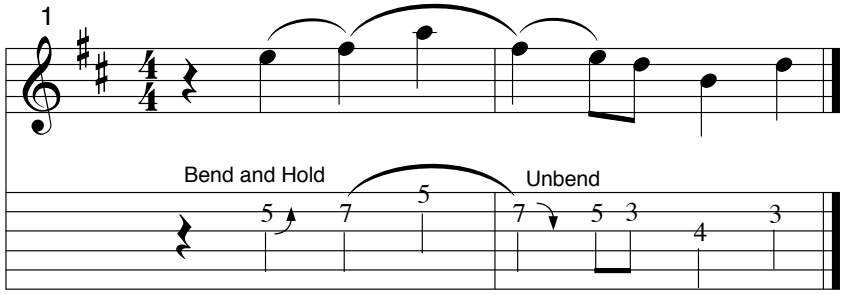


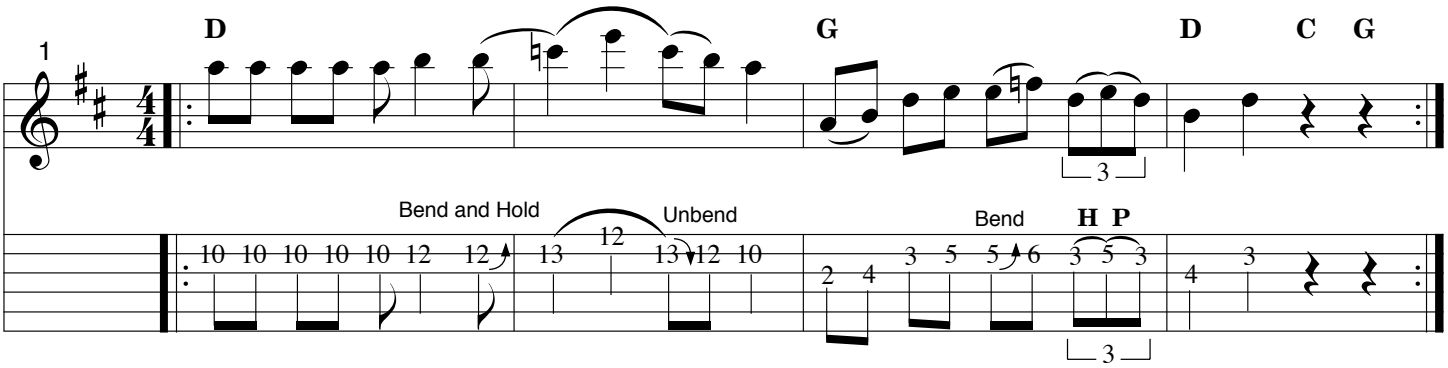
“Two of Us” Solo Example:



“Get Back” Fill Example:



"Get Back" Solo Example:



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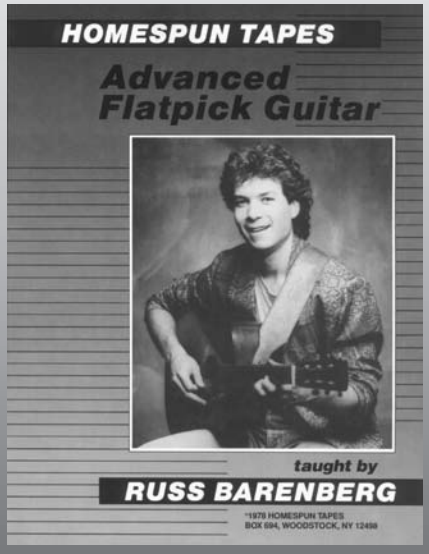

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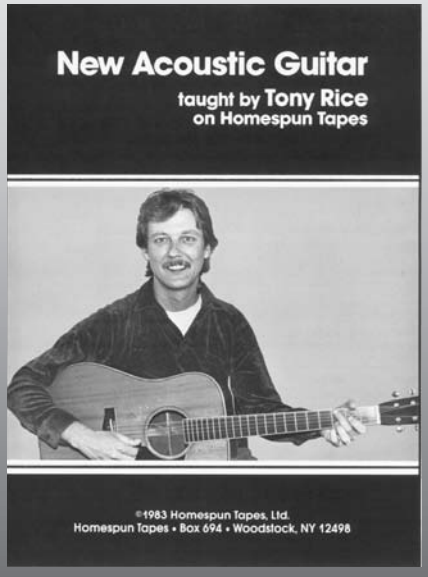
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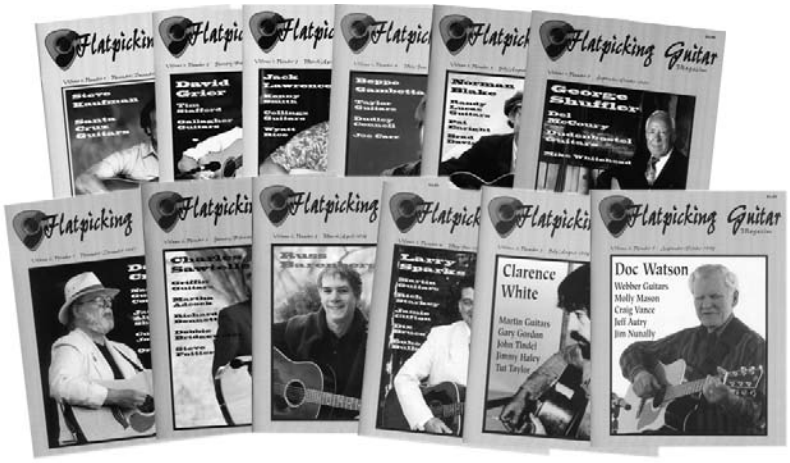
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The Merrill Guitar Company

by
Dan Miller

The "golden age" of the acoustic guitar continues to shine bright in the new millennium. Luthiers are refining their product and process to consistently produce attractive, great sounding, easy-to-play guitars. Each year the players are demanding more of their guitars and the luthiers have been answering that demand by building better guitars. It is a great time to be a guitar enthusiast!

With the very high standard players expect these days, and the fine instruments the long standing and established builders are producing, the luthier profession seems like it might be a tough field to enter in this "hay day." When a group of skilled craftsmen, who have been refining their craft for decades and have established their name with consumers, are all still producing fine instruments in record numbers, how can a new guy compete? Obviously to enter this market the product would have to be as good, or better, than anything else that is available. But how can a new builder expect to build guitars that are as good as those that are being built by luthiers who have twenty years of experience? Ask that question of Jim Merrill and he would say, "Well, I am a 'new guy' who has twenty years of experience."

Although Jim Merrill first put his name across a headstock nearly twenty years ago, he has spent the majority of his career as a repairman. Jim has consistently produced a few guitars a year since 1982, but he did not really enter the guitar builder's market in earnest until last year when he received some financial backing from his partner, Chuck Nimmo. With Chuck's help, Jim was able to take time and focus on building instead of living hand-to-mouth as a repairman and, as a result, he has been producing some very fine instruments. Many who have had the opportunity to play Merrill's guitars are finding that Jim is able to build a new guitar that has "that old sound." This statement may sound somewhat cliche, but I've played Jim's guitars and I've played pre-war Martins and, the fact is, Jim is doing it. Here are some observations from a few well respected individuals in the acoustic guitar world:

Luthier Jim Merrill

Jack Lawrence recently became the owner of a new Merrill Brazilian rosewood C-28 model and said, "The attention to detail is amazing. This guitar is built as closely to a 1930's D-28 as anything I have ever seen. For a new guitar it is incredibly punchy and loud. It is an amazing guitar. Jim is dedicated to what he is doing and the product shows it."

After playing a Merrill C-28 model, Steve Swan, of Steve Swan Guitars in California, said, "He sure knocked my socks off. In my experience it is the best recreation of a mid-30's Martin Dreadnought I've ever played in terms of cosmetics, accuracy in tone and volume, weight, and feel of the neck. When I got Jim's guitar I had a '35 D-18 and a '38 D-18 in the shop as well as a customer's '36 D-28 to compare it with. It is incredible what he has done. I am more excited about this guitar than anything since I started my store. I immediately called Jim and said I wanted him to send me three guitars a month for as long as they are building guitars. I think I've got the first five months production sold already."

Stephen Bennett, who was one of the first professional players to use a Merrill guitar said, "Three and a half years ago Jim made me my current 6-string, now being offered as the Merrill Guitar Company's Woodbridge model. It has a koa back and sides with a cedar top. I loved the guitar's appearance immediately and in the last year or so, the sound has really opened up and developed a beautiful richness that I absolutely love! It was quite good to start with—but now! I've been in the studio a lot over the last several months and have marveled repeatedly at the tone this instrument possesses. Jim also has built an absolutely amazing sounding classical guitar that I lust after. And I eagerly await the harp guitar that he is currently working on."

The seeds of Jim Merrill's luthier career were planted when he was in high school and playing bass in high school garage bands. He says, "Everybody, it seems like, always needed something done to their guitar and they were scared to death to touch it. I figured that a man put it together, so some other guy could work on it and it would be OK. That is how I started out. It got to where people started bringing me guitars with broken peg heads and things like that. I started repairing them and doing some refinishing work."

After graduating from high school Jim spent time doing various jobs while continuing to repair guitars as a hobby.

The Merrill Guitar Company: (left to right)
Chuck Nimmo, Jim Merrill, and Dave Merrill

In 1981, when Jim was 26 years old, he went to work with Bill Colgan at the Isle of Wight Instrument Company in Smithfield, Virginia. Bill had opened the shop four years earlier and, at first, the small shop did nothing but instrument repair and customization. Bill worked on his own until Jim came in to help him ease his work load. Over the course of the next 16 years Jim helped Bill's business grow from a small repair shop to a full retail store. Jim said, "At first we mainly did the day-to-day repair work of refretting, headstock repairs, structural repairs such as cracks and regluing bridges and pick guards and that sort of thing. We eventually got a nice stream of very fine instruments coming into the shop and did a lot of high-end restoration work. I really got to see some great instruments."

After Jim had been working in Bill Colgan's shop for about a year he wanted to try to build his own guitar. He says, "I have always loved D-18 Martin guitars, especially the old ones. My very first guitar I made was, as best as I could, a replica of an early '60s D-18. I used a nice old German spruce top. I didn't know about the Adirondack and all of the particulars of the old Martins at the time. But when I got that guitar finished, it really sounded good. That led to me going up to the Martin factory and scrounging around in the attic for old surplus parts. I built a replica of a 1944 era D-28 with beautiful Brazilian. That was my second guitar." After building that second guitar, Jim started producing 2 or 3 guitars a year in-between doing all of the repair work at the shop.

In 1997 Bill Colgan began his third bout with cancer and it became evident that he could not continue working at the shop and he began to close down. Jim says, "A lot of people thought that I was a partner with Bill, but I was an hourly employee." When Bill passed away, his family auctioned the tools and wood. Jim was left with no job, no tools, no wood, no savings and a family of six to feed. Jim says, "I didn't know where I was going or what I was going to do. A strong, but quiet, voice told me, 'Do what you do the best.' I had a friend call and offer me a thousand dollars worth of tools. Other people offered to pay my house payment and buy me groceries."

After a few months, Jim was introduced to a music store owner, Jim Winter, in Gloucester, Virginia. Jim was provided with a small work place over top of a garage behind the store. Jim says, "It was there that I built Stephen Bennett's guitar. The loft of this garage was so small that I could not stand up straight in it!" Luckily Jim did not have to hunch over his work bench for too long. The music store, Winter Sound, moved to a larger facility and they built a shop in a building behind the store. Jim said, "It was there that I really started getting serious about making guitars. I geared up to make a guitar of my own design, which we now call the Woodbridge model."

At this time, Jim was ready to move into guitar building more as a full time occupation but because of his reputation as a repairman the kind of jobs he was getting were the high-end, major restoration jobs of old guitars, which require a lot of time and effort. Jim said, "I kept getting so bogged down with restoration and repair that I couldn't build like I wanted to. That is when Chuck came into the picture."

Chuck Nimmo had heard of Jim's fine reputation as a repairman and brought his Martin HD-28 into the shop to have some work done on it. Chuck saw the quality of Jim's work and asked Jim why he wasn't building guitars full time. Jim told Chuck, "I would like to, but I don't know how to get that started and pay the bills at the same time." Chuck, a successful businessman, had a meeting with Jim and asked about every detail of guitar building from the cost of wood to the cost of the screws that hold the tuning pegs in place. He wrote a business plan, crunched the numbers and felt that they could grow a successful business. Chuck said that his involvement with Jim had more to do with a belief in Jim's work and the desire to see Jim succeed than it had to do with money. But a small question remained in Chuck's mind regarding quality and consistency, so he gave Jim a test. Jim says, "As a test, Chuck wanted me to build him a classical guitar. So I built him a replica of Segovia's 1937 Hauser."

It was that classical guitar, the one that Stephen Bennett said he "is lusting over," that gave Chuck Nimmo the confidence to invest in Jim Merrill. Jim said, "I had the blueprints for it and used that as my guideline. I used some great old Brazilian rosewood and some feather-weight Honduran mahogany for the neck, like the original, and old German spruce for the top." When Jim completed that guitar Chuck compared it with some other very high-end classical guitars. He said, "I took that guitar out to a friend in California who is an expert in classical guitars. I had told him that Jim was a great Dreadnought builder and he had told me that, in his experience, people who build good Dreadnoughts can not build equally fine classical guitars. They just can't do it. I took Jim's guitar and showed it to him. He had a little smirk on his face as he opened the case. When he picked up the guitar, he said, 'This is a great start, I can't believe how light this guitar is.' He played it and said, 'this is unbelievable that this is Jim's first

classical guitar.' " Chuck owns a Hauser from 1931 and said that in his opinion, and in the opinion of those who have compared the two guitars, Jim's guitar is better. Chuck said, "Jim has a gift. It is not a talent, it is not an ability. He has a gift like great artists have gifts."

The first thing Jim did after forming the partnership with Chuck was to build two prototype guitars; one was a D-18 and the other a D-28. The D-28 was built out of Honduran rosewood. Everyone that played the guitars was excited. The first introduction the public had to these new guitars was at the Roanoke Bluegrass Weekend in Roanoke, Virginia, last fall. There Jim let David Grier, Kenny Smith, Curtis Jones, and others play the guitars and he solicited their feedback. From there he built two more guitars, one a Brazilian 28, which Jack Lawrence now owns, and the other a mahogany 18, now owned by Gary Alter. The only difference in these guitars from the first two prototypes was that these had 1 and 3/4 inch neck width at the nut versus 1 and 11/16ths. Merrill will offer either of these neck widths as an option on their Dreadnought models.

Currently Jim builds three different guitar models, the Woodbridge, the Cumberland 28 (C-28) and the Clinchfield 18 (C-18). The Woodbridge is primarily a fingerpickers guitar of Jim's design. When asked about the design of this guitar, Jim said, "I took the actual outside perimeter measurement of a Dreadnought and rounded it. To my eye, it is more pleasing. It is not as deep as a Dreadnought and the bracing is identical to a 1936 OOO Martin. I intentionally built that guitar to be completely balanced across the strings."

The two Dreadnought models, the Clinchfield-18 and Cumberland-28, are exact replicas of 1930's era Martin Dreadnoughts, the only difference being the adjustable truss rod. When asked about his decision to copy old Martins, Jim said, "Primarily my aim was to provide the pickers with those pre-war guitars. So many people brought me guitars that were supposed to be replicas, and yet they weren't—and people knew that. They were trying to get them even closer to the pre-war by having me modify them with the long saddles, changing the nuts out to bone or ivory, putting an authentic looking pick guard on it. I even had requests to scallop braces and that kind of thing. So I realized that if a person is going to pay anywhere from $2500 to $4000 for a reissue and then spend several hundred dollars on top of that trying to make it even closer, I thought, 'What if someone offered an exact replica?' and I went ahead and did that."

The Dreadnought models that Jim offers include: Adirondack spruce tops with Adirondack spruce hand-scalloped braces (mid-30's bracing pattern); genuine antique (documented) elephant ivory nut and saddle; polished ebony bridge pins; through saddle; vintage pick guard material (from Henry Stocek); an original size maple bridge plate; and neck and heel block of old, light weight, Honduran mahogany. The C-18 is mahogany, the C-28 comes standard with Honduran rosewood with Brazilian rosewood as an option. The C-28 also features, thanks to two years of hard work by Randy Lucas, original 1930's size herringbone.

Other details of the Merrill Dreadnoughts include the absence of the "popsicle" or transverse brace (like the mid-30's Martins); an exact replica mid-30's size bridge (Jim mentioned that many of the replicas other companies were producing had bridges that were too thick with edges on the bridge that were too sharp); a fret wire that is the exact width of the old Martin's, but taller. Regarding the taller fret wire, Jim says, "I can go ahead and get the guitar together, level the frets, and still have plenty of meat on them. They just feel better. I also try to leave enough room for the saddle that if someone wants to go lower with the action, we can and still maintain string angle."

In recent years one-man guitar building shops, that gained a reputation for building high quality acoustic guitars, have quickly become back-logged with orders. For players wanting to own one of these fine hand-crafted instruments the wait is, in many cases, three years or more. Jim Merrill hopes that he can produce at least eight guitars a month and thus avoid a long waiting list. Since the burden of running the business and administrative end of things is being lightened by Chuck Nimmo's work, Jim gets to spend more time in the shop. Additionally, Jim has hired his brother, Dave, to work with him in the shop. Dave, a talented woodworker in his own right, spent thirteen years doing woodwork for the prestigious Mariner's Museum in Newport News, Virginia. Dave has experience with building cabinets and displays, restoring ship models and building boat replicas. With Chuck's head for business and Jim and Dave's talent with wood, the Merrill Guitar Company is off to a great start and should be producing fine handcrafted instruments for years to come.

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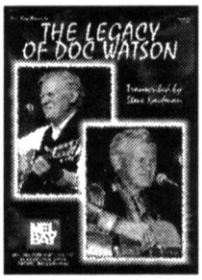

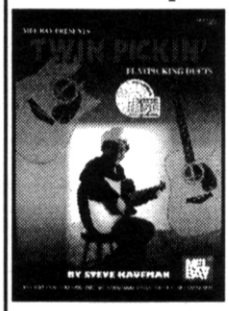

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Kaufman's Corner

by Steve Kaufman

Tami

This is a great tune that I haven't thought of in quite a while. One day in May I was conducting a workshop at Acoustic Roots in Jenkintown, PA and Scott Gantt, one of the participants, asked about this tune. So Scott, here it is just for you (and 10,000 other flatpickers).

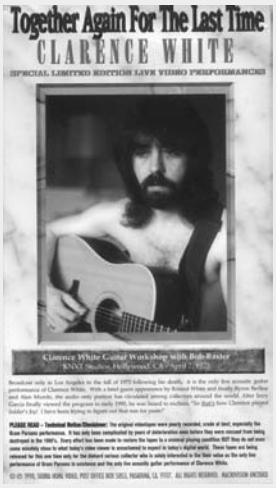
There are a lot of little nuances to pay attention to in this arrangement in order to pull it off with finesse. There are many sets of triplets and you will see which right hand pick direction works best for you. I tend to try to hit each set of triplets starting with a down swing, particularly in waltz time.

Measure 6 ends with a double stop - up swing into a set of triplets. You will hit two ups in a row.

We also play out of chord positions whenever possible in this arrangement. This arrangement is not too difficult and I don't think you will have a lot of trouble with it so take your time, and enjoy this beautiful song. I will let you in on a funny story. When *Breaking Out* first was released, a guy ordered it and sent me a fan letter. The letter stated that he hated this song in the 50's and he hates it today but this is an attribute to my playing that he can even stand to listen to me play it. (I guess that was a compliment.)

Have fun and let me know how this one treats you.

Clarence White on Video!



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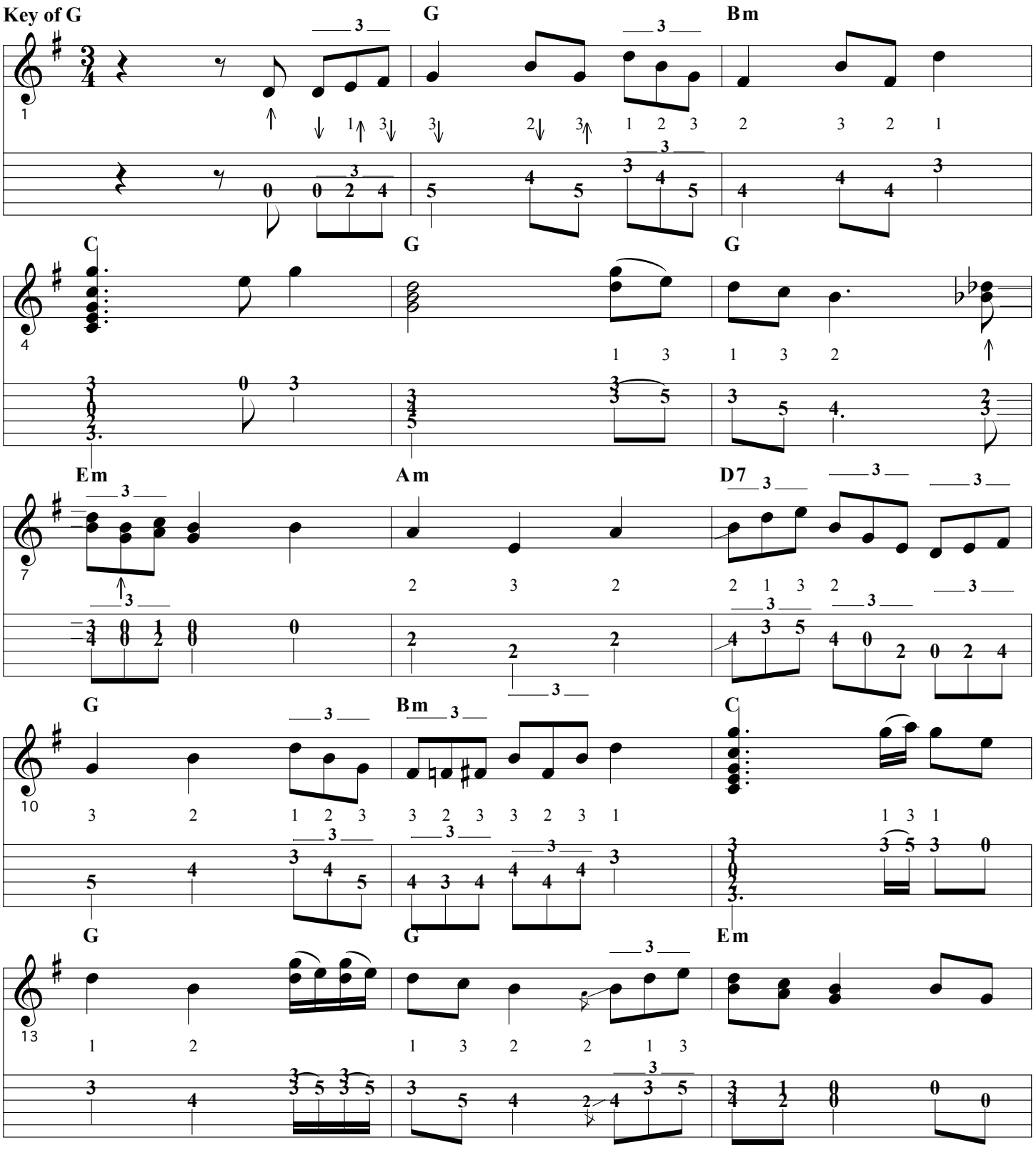
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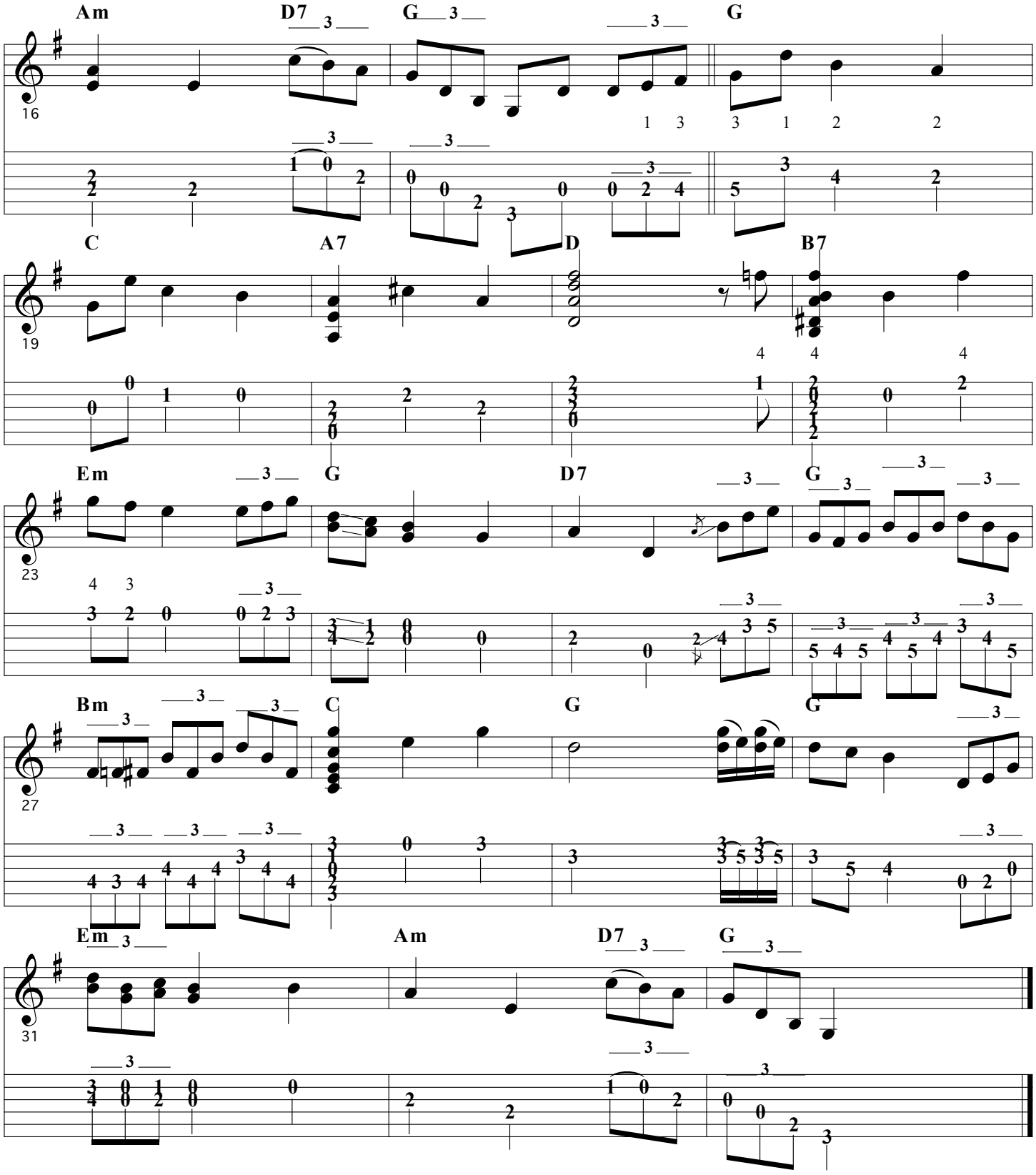
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NASHVILLE FLATTOP

By Brad Davis

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Someone sent me this picture of Earl Scruggs and me and I was reminded of how lucky I am to pick with him from time to time and how he will pull out songs that I haven't played in years. Luckily for me I have a good lick library and a well oiled ear!

Building Your Lick Library

I call this column "your" lick library because I believe each picker develops his or her own library of licks. Now keep in mind that "being a lick player" and "having a lick library" do not have to be the same thing. A "lick player" is someone who likes to get in a jam and play a lot of hot licks over chord progressions without paying much attention to the melody. Improvising with just licks can easily become boring and monotonous.

Before improvising, a picker should learn to pay close attention to melody, which means having a well developed ear. When improvising you want to keep the melody map in clear view and try to tip toe around and on top of the existing melody note structure. The key to successful improvisation is to be able to insert your library of licks into a tune while still following the shape of the melody. This means that you cannot randomly fire away lick after lick over chord changes. You first have to develop an ear that can hear the melody and then learn how to play the licks that fit the shape of that melody.

What you choose to play may very well be licks copied from another source, but in most cases the licks you play will sound unique to you because the way you shape them and fit them together will be unique. I look at developing a lick library like loading my hard drive with information that can make my jamming system run more efficiently. What am I talking about folks? Well, I'm referring to improvising —traditionally or progressively!

After talking with many students, I find that they want to be able to just sit down and pick without thinking about it. That's what a lick library will do for you if you keep the licks in memory and learn how to spontaneously fit them to follow melody forms. How to keep them in memory is very simple: Practice at a pace that allows you to keep these licks fresh in your mind and practice in a manner which helps you develop your ear.

Good News! This column is the first of many to come about lick libraries and, with the help of the audio CDs that accompany each issue, I have set up the audio portion of this column so that you can use it as an ear training method. I recommend that those of you who subscribe to the audio CD try to learn the licks from the CD without looking at the tab and then play along with the rhythm section of the audio. In the rhythm section, I play a lick along with a rhythm track and then leave space for you to repeat that lick along with the same rhythm track. This exercise will allow you to develop the ability to hear a lick or phrase and then repeat it on the guitar. This is an essential skill for learning how to improvise.

Additionally, I will demonstrate how you might shape your lick choices so that they will follow the melody of a song. Each lick library column will be followed by a column that shows how to apply the previous column's licks to a lick phrase while keeping the melody in mind. This one starts with the As and the next ones to follow will be in alphabetic order. I know what some pickers will say—"Oh man I don't want to learn licks in open A." Don't think for a minute that this A lick category will not be useful. Yes, it is not a standard like the key of G but take it from a professional, A licks are very helpful in developing the freedom to jam easily and confidently—as are licks in the other keys. If you can jam in open A then you can jam in open B and so on. When you can jam in these open keys, then the capoed improvisation will seem like child's play.

Also these A licks can be used in places where A licks are needed. Most of the time A lick sections in songs are just stumbled through because no one wants to pay much attention to them—they are not in the standard bluegrass key. But each lick section we cover will add a new piece to the puzzle and will eventually complete the image. So hang in there with me. These licks are written to be played with traditional down-up-down and with my new double-down-up technique.

Developing Your Ear

I cannot overemphasize the importance of ear training. No matter how many licks or tunes you memorize from tab, it will be difficult to learn to improvise and stick close to a melody if you do not have a well-trained ear. Try to learn the licks presented here from the audio CD before looking at the tab and practice along with the rhythm practice portion of the CD in order to help you memorize the licks. By using this method you are learning to memorize the sounds rather than numbers written on a page.

If you try to practice along with the audio CD and enjoy this form of ear training, you might be interested in a new ear training course which I have developed for guitar. I have just completed *Ear Training: Level 1* and currently have it available on two instructional audio CDs. The course is set up similarly to this column's CD lesson, however, we go into more detail about how to train the ear, present more ear training exercises, and we start out with simple five notes groups instead of two or three-measure licks.

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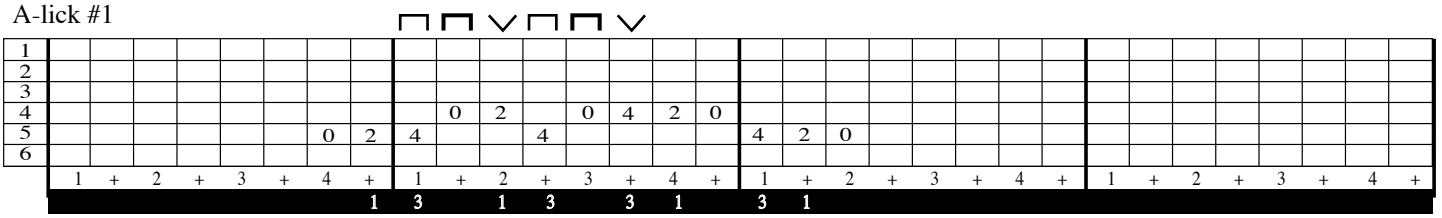
A-lick #1



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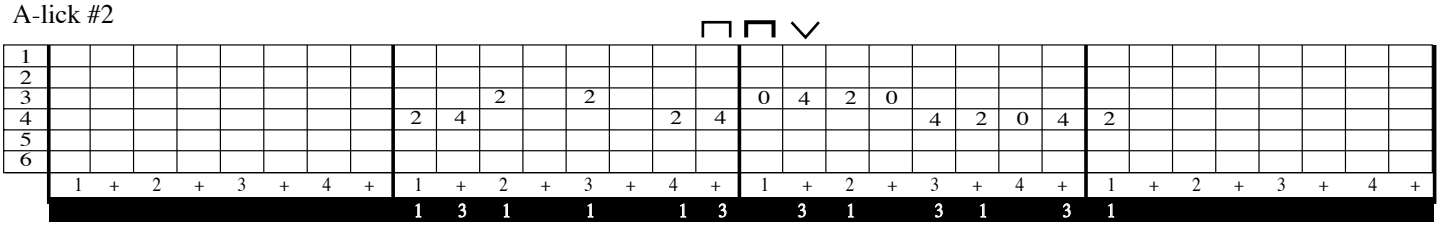

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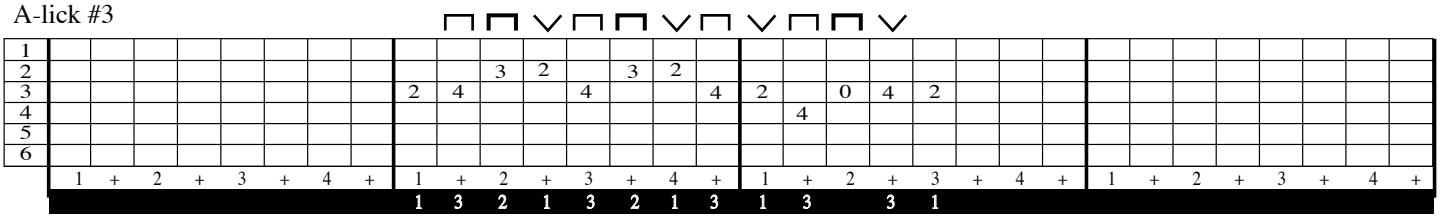

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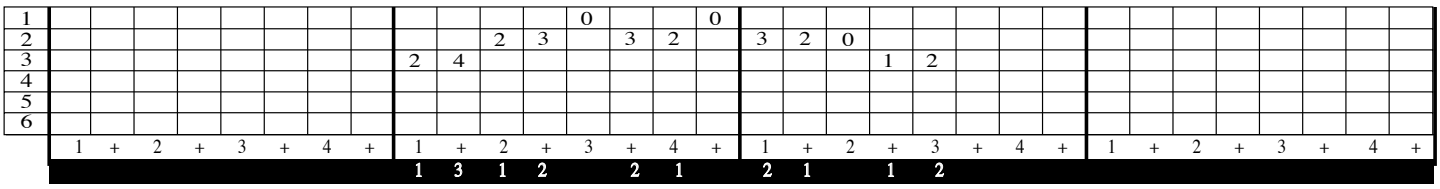

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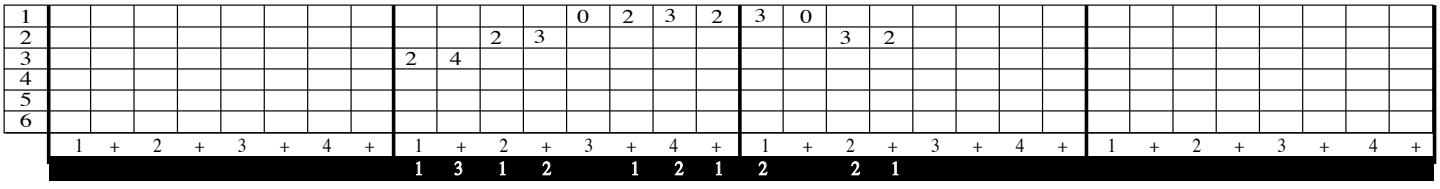

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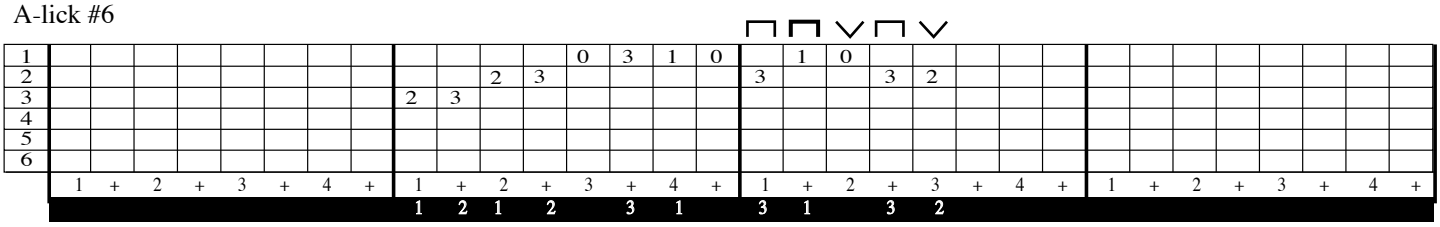

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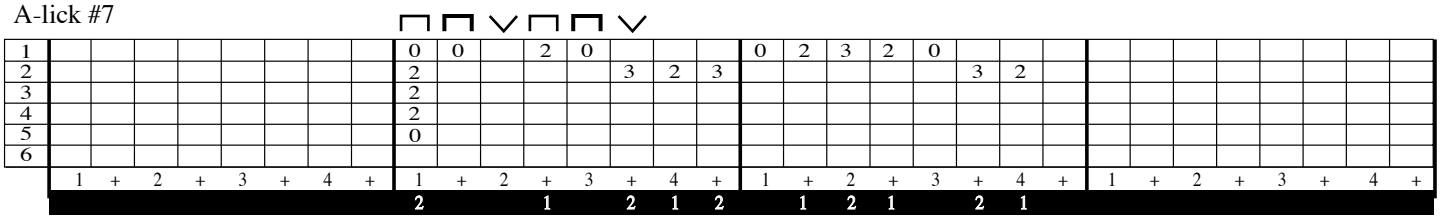

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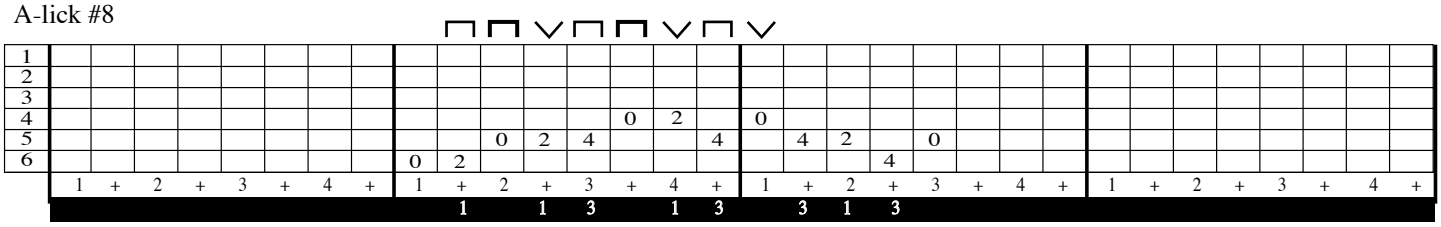

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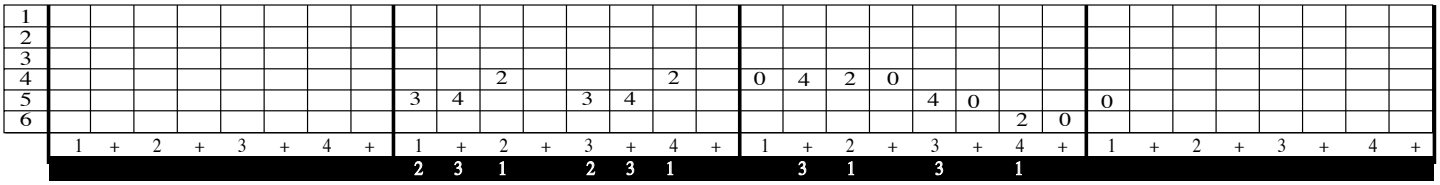

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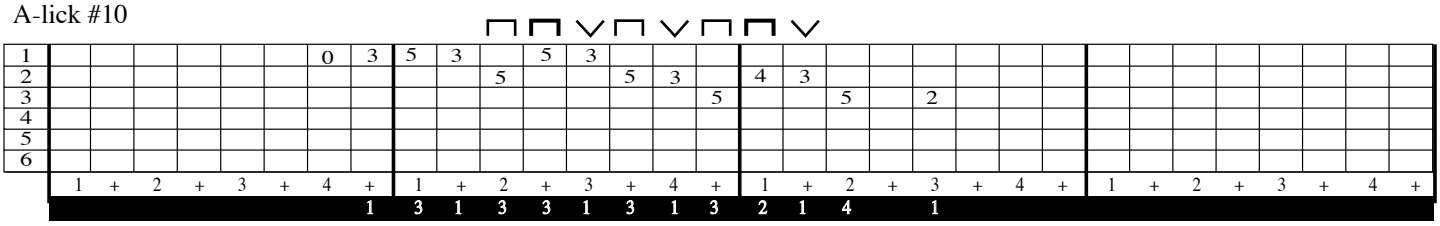

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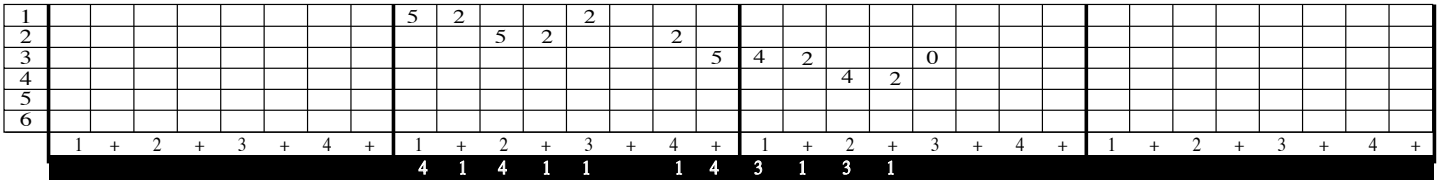

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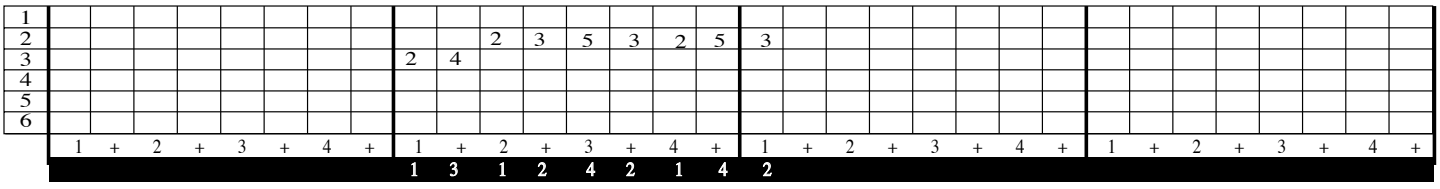


About the author: Brad Davis has many years of experience as an acclaimed bluegrass and country guitarist. With several albums to his credit, Brad's most widely heard flattop guitar work is on the Sweethearts of the Rodeo's new album titled "Beautiful Lies" on Sugar Hill Records, White Water debut album "No Gold On The Highway" and Brad's new flattop sampler album titled "Climbin' Cole Hill" both on Raisin Cain. Brad's most widely heard electric guitar work is on Marty Stuart's gold record " This Ones Gonna Hurt You" and on Marty's most recent album "Honky Tonkin's What I Do Best." Brad debuted his patented "Brad Bender," the string bender for acoustic/electric guitars, and the unique style it offers, on countless national television shows with the Sweethearts of the Rodeo - bluegrass band. Brad also spent several years on the road with the Forester Sisters. Touring and recording w/ Marty Stuart and White Water, songwriting, record production, and the production of instructional material for Z-TAPE (BDM Publishing) instructional courses are wedged into his tight schedule. Brad's newest CD/booklet course"The Acoustic Speed Picking Blue book" features his incredible "Double-Down-Up" speed picking technique.

Break Time

by Chris Jones

Leaning On The Everlasting Arms

Greetings from the Night Drivers' log cabin at the "Camp Rude Bluegrass Festival" in Parkfield, California. I'd like to write every column from here, but unfortunately this is only a once a year festival.

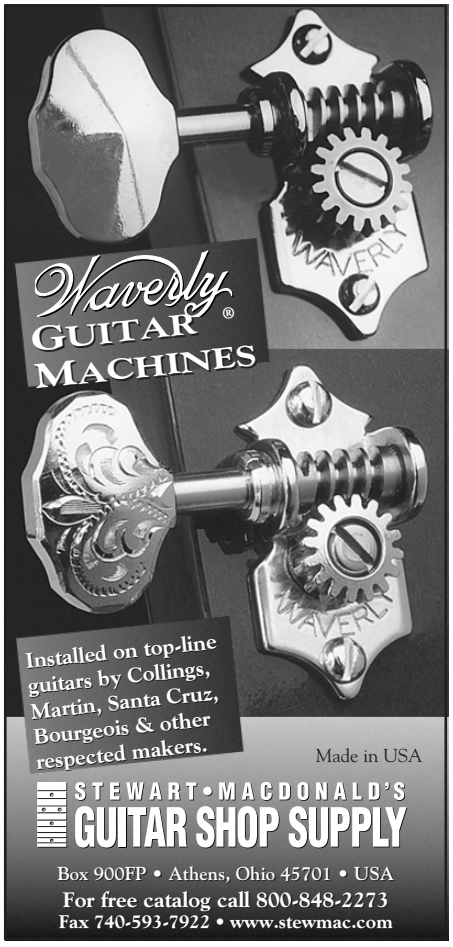
I recently recorded and released a new video for Musicians' Workshop called *My Favorite Solos*, in which I taught a bunch of the breaks that I had recorded on my CDs. I bring this up not strictly to plug a product (you can stop laughing now), but because making this video was probably as educational for me as I hope it is for the bluegrass guitar student. The process of going back and re-learning each break note for note, then tabbing it out—in addition to being a pain in the rear end at times—gave me insight into my own creative process and helped me analyze some of the patterns that had become automatic for me. It also helped to expose some weaknesses in my playing, but I'll save that for the special "My Weaknesses" column, scheduled for the May-June issue of 2009.

One of the characteristics that I noticed was the way crosspicking was used in a few of these breaks. Obviously, crosspicking is something used by many lead guitar players, although some take an all-or-nothing approach to it, depending on the solo. I have a tendency to drop it in the solos in limited amounts. This can be quite useful as a means of filling out the melody, without having to play runs in a place where runs wouldn't be appropriate.

One of the breaks that I taught was from my recording of "Leaning On The Everlasting Arms" (from *Follow Your Heart*, Rebel 1749). It's a fairly traditional, melody-oriented break, but does use a small amount of crosspicking over the first C chord (with the capo on the second fret). I improvised this break in the studio without too much difficulty, but when it came to sitting down and teaching it slowly, it seemed less easy. I used alternating pick direction for the brief crosspicking roll, and I would recommend repetitive practicing of it to help lodge it in your brain. Then, before cranking up the speed, make sure you can play it cleanly at a slower tempo. This will ensure that it will be accurate when it's up to speed, and the good news is that will only temporarily drive you nuts!

I hope you like this break—it does provide a pretty good example of the spare use of crosspicking, which you can easily apply to other breaks. I never record breaks in the studio thinking that I'll someday end up actually having to learn them and tab them out for instructional purposes, but perhaps I will in the future ("Yeah, I liked that one, but I think it'll be too weird to write tab for ... I'd better play it again.").

One footnote: I'd like to dedicate this column to Bill Napier who recently passed away. He played guitar and mandolin with the Stanley Brothers (among others) and was, along with George Shuffler, one of the pioneers of crosspicking bluegrass guitar.



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Leaning On The Everlasting Arms

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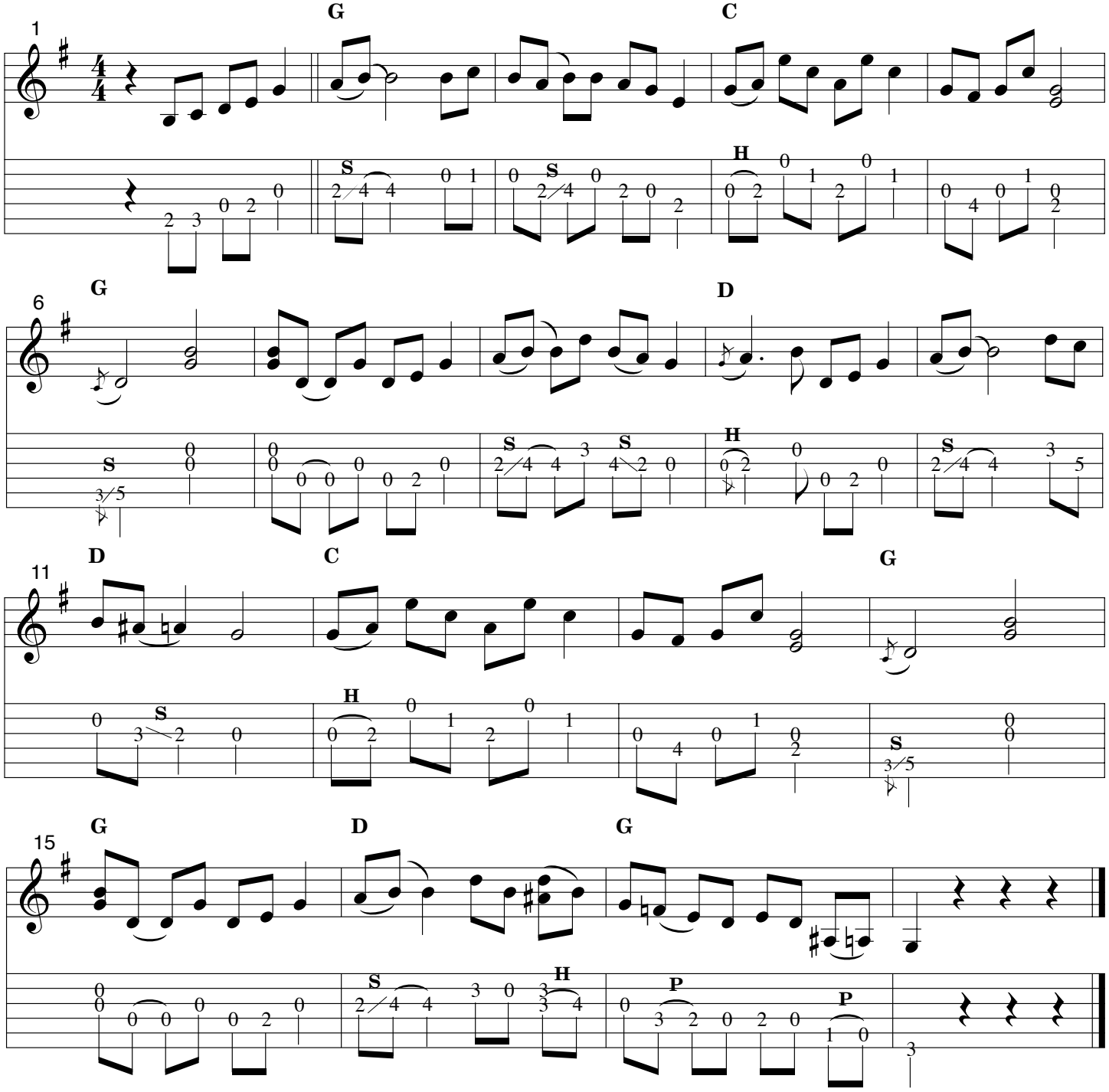
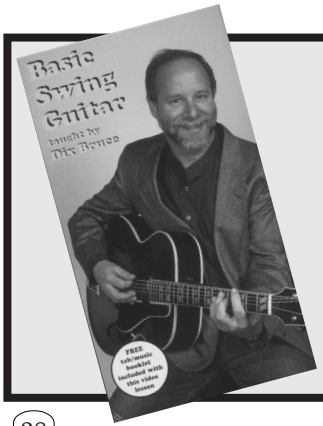

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The Pioneer Flatpicking of Don Reno
"When I'm Playing Banjo I'm Working; When I'm Playing Guitar I'm Having Fun."

by Rob Bulkley

Don Reno (1927-1984) is best known for his banjo style, his prolific songwriting, and the classic band he fronted with Red Smiley. Less well-known is that fact that he was a child prodigy who got his first guitar when he was eight, had a radio show playing guitar and harmonica at age twelve, and was a trendsetting bluegrass flatpicker, writing tunes and songs featuring his propulsive lead guitar style, including the classsic "Country Boy Rock'n'Roll."

Reno's playing style incorporated a strong melodic sense, flashy runs, jazzy chord solos, harmonized scales, and effects such as sliding down the fingerboard, "zooming" from a high note to a low. The recent release of *The Golden Guitar of Don Reno* on King has sparked new interest in his guitar prowess. Don's youngest son Don Wayne Reno performs with his brothers Ronnie and Dale as The Reno Brothers, keeping their Dad's sound alive along with their own original music.

Recently I had the good fortune to speak with Don Wayne about his dad, how he got started in music, and about his driving, straightahead bluegrass guitar playing.

Was your dad's family musical?

I don't think my granddad was. My grandmother might have been; she wrote poetry, but his brother Harley was the one that got him into playing. He was sixteen years Dad's senior, and had a band called the Haywood Mountaineers. They'd come over to practice one night, they were eating supper, and Dad, I guess he was about five years old, snuck in there, got a hold of the banjo, and found that he could pick out "May I Sleep In Your Barn Tonight. Mister?" and that's what got it all started. And he'd sneak around and hide and watch people play—they had several neighbors around there that had bands and played—and he'd try to get in on the jams. His first guitar was a Martin 000-18, and he got that in '36, when he was about 8, 9 years old. I remember him saying he thought that was the prettiest thing he'd ever seen, and

one day he had it sitting up on his bed. He was backing off looking at it, admiring it, backing off and looking at it and he conked his head on the mantel!

How did he come up with his style of playing?

I think that came more or less just from playing electric guitar. When he was thirteen he took a bus to Atlanta and played on Jack Guthrie's *Oklahoma Hills*. I think he evolved that flatpicking style that he does from picking the electric guitar, and then playing the fiddle tunes with Tommy Magness (one of Bill Monroe's early fiddle players), trying to figure out the notes on the guitar. Tommy basically showed him how to play rhythm. He told me that Tommy got to where he wouldn't hardly pick unless Dad was playing with him. And he learned a lot of those old fiddle tunes and started flatpicking. A lot of the banjo playing style actually came from the guitar.

So this would make him one of the first to play fiddle tunes on the guitar.

Doc Watson says Dad was the first person he ever heard flatpick a guitar bluegrass-style. I've got written documentation of that. They picked a lot together down through the years, too. There are some live tapes of that around.

When he was twelve, he had an early morning radio show on WSPA in Spartanburg, South Carolina, playing guitar and harmonica. At age fourteen he went to work for Arthur Smith (with whom he later recorded "Feudin' Banjos," later copied by the rest of the world as "Dueling Banjos.")

Arthur taught him how to read music, and he wrote down for you what you played, and he said if you wanted to get paid you played what was written down. He didn't stay there more than a few years, because he had to be so confined. He could read music as well as anybody. That's how he learned a lot of those pop tunes (note: Don was to introduce many pop tunes, such as "The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise," "Limehouse Blues," and "Little Rock Getaway" into the bluegrass instrumental repertoire.) He could play by ear, too, you know, but at the same time he had to read.

He began writing early in life as well. Tell me about "Tarnation," (a jazzy piece with a tricky chord progression, performed in open F. It appears on David Grier's *Lone Soldier* as well as *The Golden Guitar Of Don Reno*.)

He wrote it when he was sixteen, did it on his shows, and recorded it twice. The first time was on that guitar album that got lost, and we recorded it one time with him, on an album (Windy Ridge, *Still Cuttin' Up*), back in the early eighties. Like I say, I thought it was pretty amazing for a sixteen year old kid to be flatpicking when nobody else was even doing it.

[After a brief stint playing twin electric guitars in a band with Hank Garland, Don Reno settled on the banjo as his principal instrument, and joined Bill Monroe in 1948 after Earl Scruggs left the band (Scruggs had actually been hired after Monroe had offered the banjo chair to Don, who had enlisted in the army). After leaving Monroe, Don met up with Red Smiley and formed the classic singing partnership, making their first recording on King in January, 1952. He managed to play a fair amount

of guitar on their King recordings and in live appearances. In 1954, long before before multitrack recording, he played a guitar solo on his banjo tune "Reno Ride" merely by swinging the banjo out of the way during the fiddle break and picking up the guitar! He switched back during the next fiddle break. In 1959 Don and Red Smiley recorded two albums (*Country Songs* and *Hymns And Sacred Songs*) featuring just their duet singing and his guitar lead.]

How did the *Country Songs* and *Hymns And Sacred Songs* albums come about?

Sid Nathan (owner of King Records) went through a time when he thought the banjo was killing everything—and wanted less banjo and more guitar, really, to compete with rock'n'roll. He didn't want banjo on anything—he didn't want it on Stanley Brothers, he didn't want it on Reno and Smiley. Sid loved his guitar playing—he went along with it to keep Sid happy, and it didn't hurt anything, just eliminated the banjo. I thought the way they did that gospel album was just outstanding, the tone they were getting, and the way Red would round out everything with his bass notes—they just jelled together with Dad playing lead, and even when they were both playing rhythm, it just jelled like magic—so that's one of my favorites.

We really can't leave out a mention of Red Smiley's rhythm guitar playing...

He had a wonderful rhythm—his right hand was just incredible. He used one of those big triangle picks like you'd use on an autoharp or something, so you can imagine why that D-run comes out so strong on those albums, because of that pick he used… We found the herringbone he used on all the early stuff; it's pictured on that gospel album I was talking about, it's got a little star on the peghead. Some guy had it for sale, and we wanted it, but it was just too much money. At least we got to see it, took some pictures of it, play it a little bit, you know, it was a neat experience

Unfortunately, Red Smiley's health problems ended their partnership in 1964, and in 1966 Dad went on to team up with Bill Harrell, a partnership which lasted until 1976.

He didn't do as much guitar playing with Bill in the festivals; he did in the clubs. One reason he didn't is because Bill was playing his guitar. He was using Dad's herringbone and he used heavy gauge strings and Dad just wouldn't even play it—he refused to play it with heavy gauge strings on it.

It's amazing it survived.

It almost didn't. Bill was hard on that guitar, very hard on it. But it's all in good shape now and intact, just looks like forty miles of bad road as far as the finish on it, but it plays like a dream. Dale's got his guitar and I've got his banjo. It's a '37 herringbone D-28. He always thought it was '39, and then somebody looked at it and told us it was a '37. Latest I've heard from our bass player, Robin, he looked up the serial number on it and he says it's a '40. I'm not real sure what year it is. I guess I'd believe Robin. Dad bought it from Sonny Meade, a fiddle player, in 1965 in Richmond. He used a heavy-gauge Fender pick, the big one. That's what he used most times; he could use the other small ones and did if he didn't have one in his pocket. He used medium gauge strings

Tell me about *The Golden Guitar of Don Reno*.

We found a guitar album that Dad recorded that was lost for twenty years. Reno and Harrell had gone to Nashville to record an album and Bill Harrell's voice went out on him, so they decided to do the guitar album. Well, it never came out. The tracks were kind of rough; they'd picked up a bass player that didn't know the material, and that's probably why they didn't put it out. We found it, and just added something to them to sweeten up the tone a little bit. I played bass on it, Dale put some mandolin chops, and Ronnie put some rhythm guitar. It was a lot of fun to get in there and play on the tracks because all the talking and everything was still on there; it was almost like he was there live doing it with us.

[I am watching a video shot by my friend Bill Scott. Don and his sons are performing in a high school gymnasium in Darrington, Washington, towards the end of his life. Between numbers he looks tired and worn, but when he straps on his old D-28 the life comes into his hands, and despite the bad quality of the video sound, his guitar playing is impeccable, relaxed and punchy. The old numbers are fresh; the crowd of transplanted Tarheels roars its appreciation. After a particularly fine tune that his son Don Wayne performs on banjo, Don cracks "That's what happens when you leave the banjo on the floor and tell them not to mess with it."]

Did you dad play much guitar when you were performing together?

He got to where he was doing a lot more guitar playing with us, 'cause he'd switch over to guitar when I was on banjo. He was always cutting up, even when he felt bad, it seemed like when he hit the stage he just felt better and he'd come to life and for a little while he just felt great. I was always kind of mesmerized by him; he could command your attention and hold it for as long as he wanted. When he was on, you were focussed on what he was doing. If you didn't he'd let you know.

It must have been amazing to work with him.

It was wonderful. He was a pleasure to be on stage with, but you didn't drag when you were on stage with him. He'd let you and the crowd and everybody else know if he thought you were dragging, and he'd get you back with him; he wanted you to play with him.

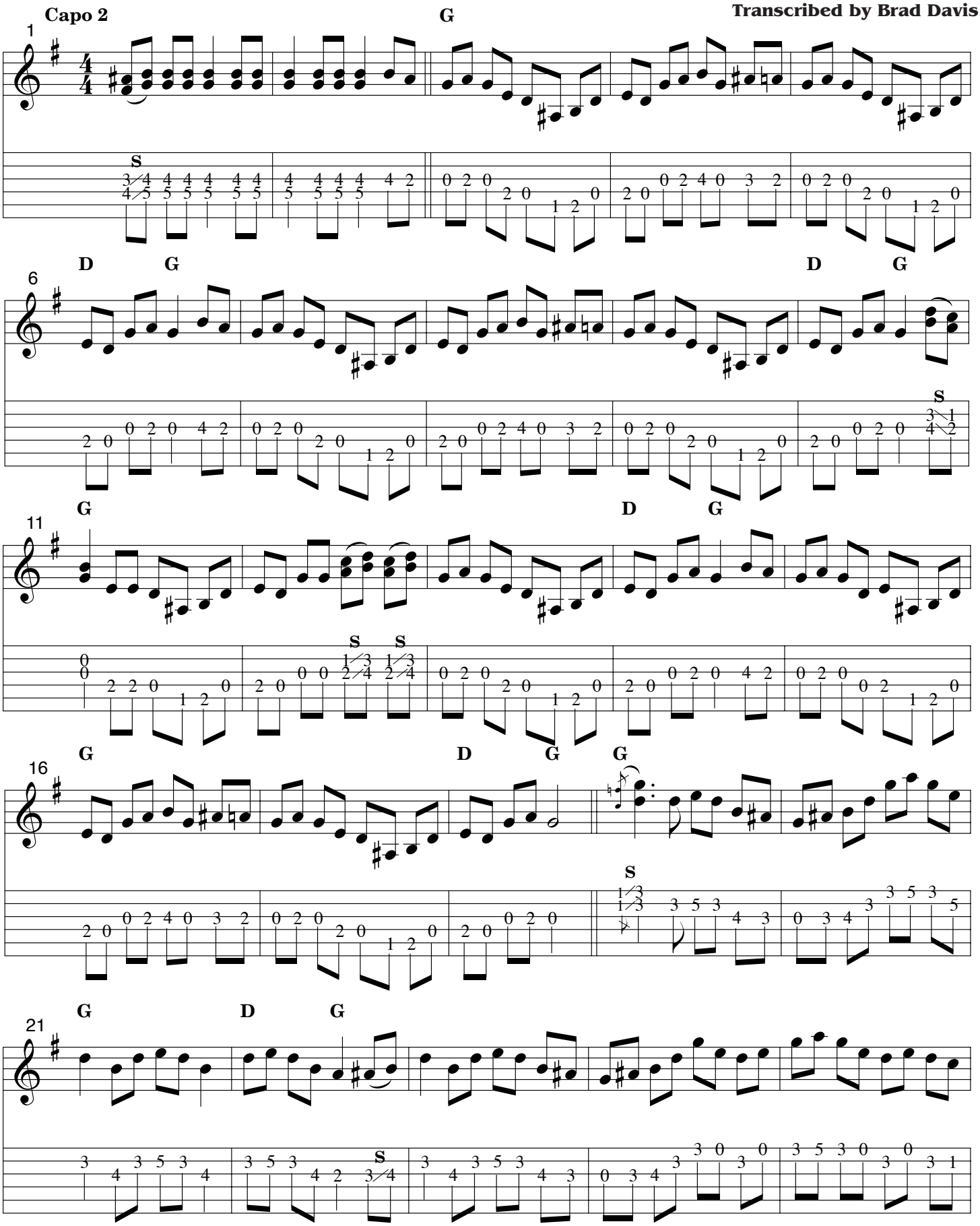
What did he expect from his musicians?

He liked drive; he liked the rhythm to really drive and he liked good, solid open-chord rhythm. He never told me that much, as far his technique; I learned a lot just from watching him. He had a lot more chord theory than than any of his kids do right now, you know. He could walk all the way down the neck in any chord, and that's something I've never been able to do. I think he was one of the finest guitar players that ever lived. He loved the guitar. You might just say in his own words, "When I'm playing banjo I'm working, when I'm playing guitar I'm having fun."

Don Reno Recordings: The recently released *Golden Guitar of Don Reno* provides an excellent introduction to his playing. I would also recommend buying the King boxed set (KNG7001), which includes all of Reno & Smiley's output up from 1952 through 1959. His first recordings of guitar in a bluegrass format are here, as well as "Country Boy Rock'n'Roll" and the entire "Country Songs" album, which is all guitar. Don recorded guitar tracks on nearly every album he made, with Smiley, Harrell, and under his own leadership. For example, there is a smoking version of "Katy Hill" on *Tally Ho!* by Reno & Harrell.

Thanks to: Don Wayne Reno, Todd DeGroff, and Bill Scott.

Gray Eagle

Arranged by Don Reno
Transcribed by Brad Davis

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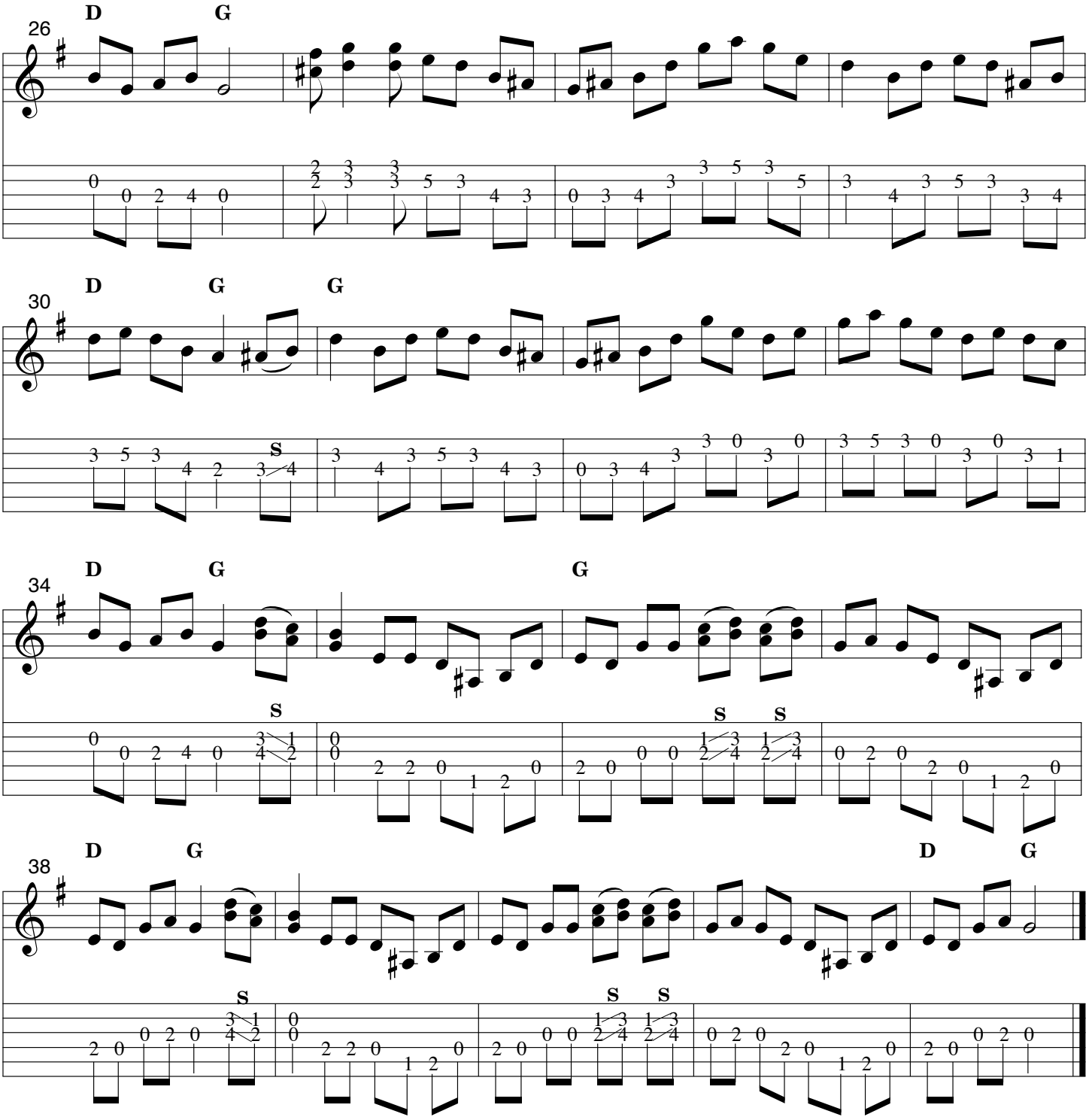
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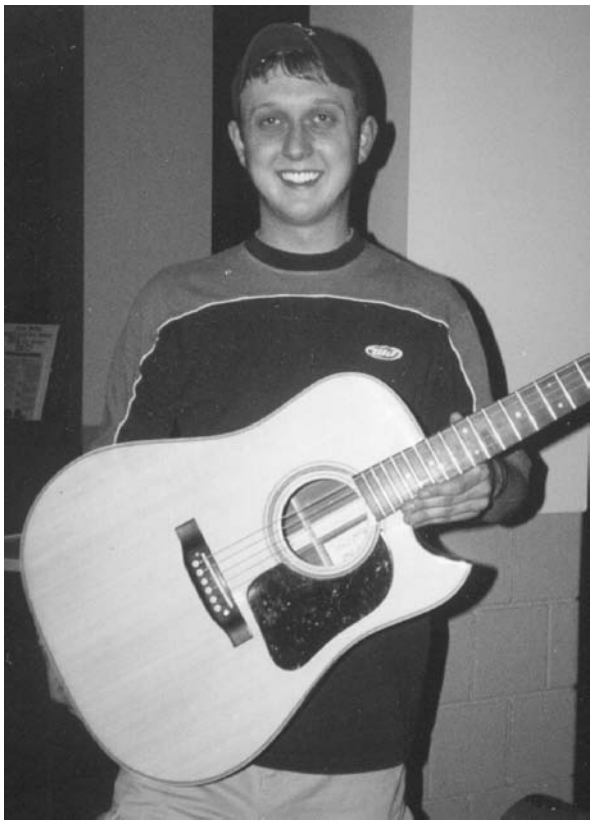
JAM TUNES

Merlefest 2000 Champ
Adam Wright
"Golden Eagle Hornpipe"



During the past five years the flatpicking guitar contest at Merlefest has been a frustrating one for Adam Wright. He had taken the third place prize three times and the second place prize one time, but the first place honor had always eluded him. Adam came prepared for this year's contest ready to win. However, after he saw the competition, which included former national champion Robert Shafer and one of Adam's mentors, Fred Duggin, Adam says that he did not think he had a chance of winning. The judges thought differently. They were impressed enough with his arrangements and performance of "Cotton Patch Rag" and "Golden Eagle Hornpipe" in the preliminary round to advance him to the finals. In the final round Adam played "Wild Fiddler's Rag" and "Tom & Jerry" with what was obviously the performance of a champion because the judges selected Adam Wright as the 2000 Merlefest flatpicking champ.

For the past six years the name Adam Wright has appeared on the contestant roster of almost every flatpicking guitar contest between Merlefest, in North Carolina, and Winfield, in Kansas. During those six years he has won the Kentucky state championship two times, the Tennessee state championship two times, and the Indiana state championship one time. He has also won the Kentucky state mandolin championship two times and placed third at the national mandolin championships at Winfield. Additionally, he made the top five cut on guitar at Winfield when he was only 16 years old. While these are all admirable accomplishments, the first place guitar prize at a large national competition had eluded Adam—until Merlefest 2000. When asked if he was going to go to Winfield this year and take a shot at the national championship, Adam replied hesitantly in his slow southern drawl, "Well...I don't know..." However, Adam's former teacher and rhythm man, Rob Pearcy, said, "He will be there."

Adam Wright, currently 22 years old and an employee at the Gibson factory in Nashville, started playing the guitar when he was 13. He explains that until he graduated from eighth grade he had lived with his grandparents in Knottsville, Kentucky, and it was his grandfather who encouraged him to take up the guitar. Adam says, "He would sing old country songs and play the guitar. I would play with him, but I didn't play lead until I moved to Nashville."

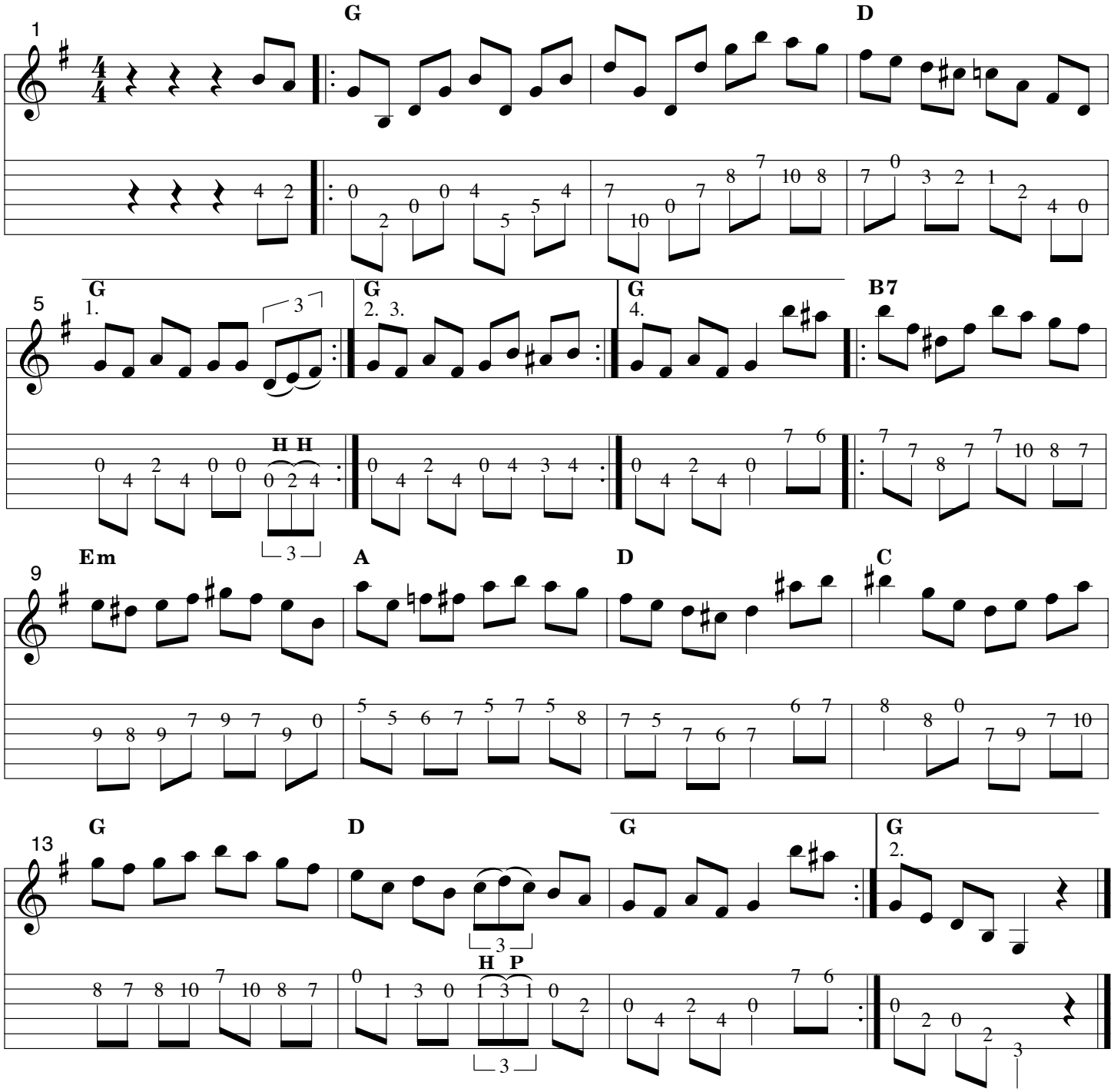
Upon graduation from the eighth grade, Adam moved to Nashville to live with his mother. That summer he met Rob Pearcy at a festival and Rob told Adam about the bluegrass music program that he taught at Hunter's Lane High School (for more information on Rob Pearcy and Hunter's Lane, see *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, Volume 3, Number 3). Adam enrolled in Hunter's Lane in 1993 and took classes from Rob all four years he attended the school. During his high school years he worked at Opryland and had a chance to play on the Grand Ole Opry twice with Mike Snyder's band.

Adam says that when he first began learning to play lead guitar he was learning from Rob and Steve Kaufman books. Eventually he knew he had to get away from memorized arrangements so he started listening to fiddle players and picking up things from other players at festivals and jams. He credits Rob, Fred Duggin and Tim May as being the three players who have helped him the most. In contests he usually prefers to play Texas style fiddle tunes that he picks up directly from fiddle players. He picks a 1993 Martin HD-28 that he has owned since 1995.

Upon graduation from high school in 1997, Adam took the job at Gibson and has been working there building mandolins since that time. If you want to see Adam at work, visit the new Gibson factory at Opry Mills in Nashville. If you want to see Adam pick, attend any of the festivals that have a guitar competition and he is likely to be there.

On the following page we present Adam Wright's arrangement of "Golden Eagle Hornpipe." His exact contest arrangement appears on the CD which accompanies this issue.

Golden Eagle Hornpipe

Arranged by Adam Wright
Transcribed by Brad Davis

To hear Adam Wright's Contest Winning Arrangement of "Golden Eagle Hornpipe"
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Masters of Rhythm Guitar:

Ranger Doug

by Dan Dingeldein

When you mention western rhythm guitar, one the first players to come to my mind is Ranger Doug from Riders in the Sky. Formerly known as Doug Green, the young man who spent time playing guitar and bass for Bill Monroe back in the late sixties, Ranger Doug has been an icon of western music for the past twenty years. Since he is known foremost as a singer, yodeler, and entertainer extraodinaire, his superb guitar work usually takes a back seat. However, his style of western rhythm is worthy of study and in this article we want to bring Ranger Doug's rhythm guitar playing to the forefront.

Those of you who are familiar with Texas "sock" rhythm, where there is a moving bass line followed by a closed position percussive chordal strum (ala Eldon Shamblin—see Dix Bruce's article on page 46 of Volume 3, Number 2), will notice that Ranger Doug's style of rhythm is a little different. Instead of playing a walking bass line, he plays a full chord strum and then follows it with the percussive chord strum. Those of you who have the audio CD can listen to Doug demonstrate this technique to get a better feel for it—or pick up one of those Riders In The Sky CDs!

I conducted the following interview on a Saturday afternoon in Nashville, Tennessee, along with our editor Dan Miller.

At what age did you become interested in the guitar?

The first thing that I remember vividly was the rhythm guitar on the Vaughn Monroe record *Riders in the Sky* that came out in about 1949. I would have been three or four. I remember the really strong rhythm guitar on that album. It just had this full sound like CHUNG-DIGI-CHUNG-DIGI-CHUNG. It was all very exciting. Also, my uncles Arvid and Hank both played guitar and my mother sang with them. They sang a lot of the national barn dance material.

Your father was in the Navy and you moved around a lot. Did that have any type of influence on your music?

Subliminally, maybe. What I heard in California probably had the most influence on me. That was when I first heard the Wagon Masters. They were a band at Knott's Berry Farm and they did western music and cowboy harmony. I just fell in love with that sound, and have gotten to know the members since then. That was a real defining moment in my life musically. Hearing cowboy music really brings back my childhood and all of the smells and tastes that I associate with it.

How did you get started in bluegrass?

I started playing guitar in high school and I had a friend, Jim McQuaid, that played banjo. It was such a small school and he had such a strong personality, he said, "You play guitar? Great, you're going to play bluegrass!" When we first started I was just excited to be playing with someone, but then I really started to enjoy it. The name of our group was the Big Sandy Boys. We played around and made some money; it was a really good time.

How did you come about getting the rhythm guitar slot with Bill Monroe?

In college I played in a band with Nolan Faulkner. He was a mandolin player that was really into Bill. So when I auditioned for Monroe I already knew everything that he did and exactly how he did it.

When did you play with Bill?

I started with Bill in April of 1967. He had lost his guitar player and had some people filling in for him. He hired me and I stayed with him through half of the summer until he hired Roland White full-time and I went back to college.

When did you make the change from the bluegrass style rhythm to the western style guitar?

After I left Bill I went back to school at the University of Michigan for one year to finish my degree. Then I immediately moved to Nashville to get involved in music. I played bass with Bill Monroe for about seven months and then spent about two weeks with Jimmy Martin. After that I went to work for George Gruhn managing his store and met David Sebring, who also worked at Gruhn's. He really got me started in the style of chord/rhythm-chop as compared to the bass-note/rhythm style of playing. Another guy named Ron Hillis, known "King Chord," also taught me a lot.

That style is different from what the Texas "western swing" rhythm players do. They play a bass line and then a rhythm-chop, but you play a chordal strum followed by the rhythm-chop?

If you are playing the bass line, you are just repeating what the bass is doing and I've got Too Slim, the Walter Page of Western bass players, in the band so I don't need to play the bass line. Playing the full chordal strum on the first and third gives you a full sound and fills in the space between the bass on one end and the fiddle on the other.

With your particular style of playing is there someone that you really paid attention to when you were starting to learn?

Obviously everything that Lloyd Perryman did with the Sons of the Pioneers. He could play this style great. It had a great float to it. What I play, and what all the good western players play, really has an interesting float to it. I have played with some Django style players and they really push the beat, it really leans forward. But that's not what we do; we kind of lay back on it a little bit. As for chord forms, I have always learned from sitting down with other people and having them show me things.

Are you able to hear the chords changes in the songs or does this music still lend itself to prearrangement?

It tends to be more worked out. When you get together with a bunch of cowboy singers you can't jam like you can with a bunch of bluegrass singers. It's not because the chords are so hard, but it's because the harmonies are so intricate. Chord-wise you can pretty well figure out the basic outline of a song, but they can get pretty sophisticated.

The chord structures to these western songs fairly sophisticated?

Well it can be as sophisticated as you want to make it. You can play most of the songs with the standard 1-4-5 progressions, but that wouldn't sound correct with this style of music. So, you have to fill in the empty spaces with the fuller chords.

What does that movement add to the music?

It adds that airy, loping feel. The idea for the rhythm guitar in western music, as in most every other kind of music, is just to support the music, to make it breathe. This is the breath of the band.

Do you find that when you work up songs with the Riders, you have to adjust what chord you play in relationship to the vocal chord that is being sung?

I find that happens all too often, especially when I have worked up a song by myself, or written a song myself. When I try to put it together with the band, and add the trio vocal parts, there seems to always be a contrast. So you either change the melody or change the chord. You always have to be on your toes and constantly changing. That's where Joey (Joey the Cowpolka King on accordian) comes in. His expertise on chord formations really helps out.

What was the first band you were in that used this style of guitar playing?

In the early 1970's I played in the Lewis Brown Orchestra and I also played with Lewis in a Dixieland band at a Shakey's pizza parlor here in Nashville. Lewis really knows a lot about what a guitar should sound like in a swing band. He was a horn player, but he really knew a lot about chords and he taught me a lot about the rhythm approach that I use, which is different than what most people use.

When did you become focused on the western style music?

Well, like bluegrass was for me in college, western music became that new mania for me in the mid-seventies. That was when I really set about learning that particular repertoire. I tried putting together a couple of bands, but to no avail. It tooks a few years to come up with the combination of myself, Woody Paul and Too Slim.

Were Woody and Slim living in Nashville at the time?

Yes they were. Slim had moved here from Michigan to become a songwriter. He was playing electric bass in a band and wanted to expand his playing by learning the upright bass, so this was a great outlet. Woody had just moved back here after receiving his doctorate from MIT and was playing with Wilma Lee Cooper. He was also looking for something else to expand his playing. The one thing we enjoy about western music is that is adventurous. Lyrically, also, it can be very poetic. Western music uses a lot of really weird chords that are perfectly acceptable and you don't feel restricted by the form, so you can go anywhere.

How long has Riders in the Sky been together?

Since November of 1977. I had been singing cowboy songs—Gene Autry, Tex Ritter songs—since the mid-seventies. In those days material was not as available as it is today, so it really took some digging.

Did you find that it was difficult to promote yourselves at the start?

No, people really took to it almost immediately. It was so different; it didn't sound like any other band that was out there. Partly, it was the stage presence. We went up on stage in the old cowboy outfits, dragging cactus and saddles up on stage. We were trying to make a statement by letting people know that everybody was going to have fun. We were going to engage the audience with all of this crazy stuff. It was a little something for everybody—the nostalgia people got into it and the contemporaries that grew up during the folk era really enjoyed it and the kids... just about all kids like cowboys.

Has your style and approach changed over the course of the twenty-five years that you have been playing with the Riders?

Not a lot. I'm always trying to learn something new. I've been working with these three note chords lately. That's really more of the gypsy jazz style, but I have found that some of these chords fill in from time to time. Having Joey, the accordion player, in the group has really opened up our chord structure. He will play a chord on the accordion and then we'll work up the structure. Joey has been a big improvement on my style as well as the overall sound of the band.

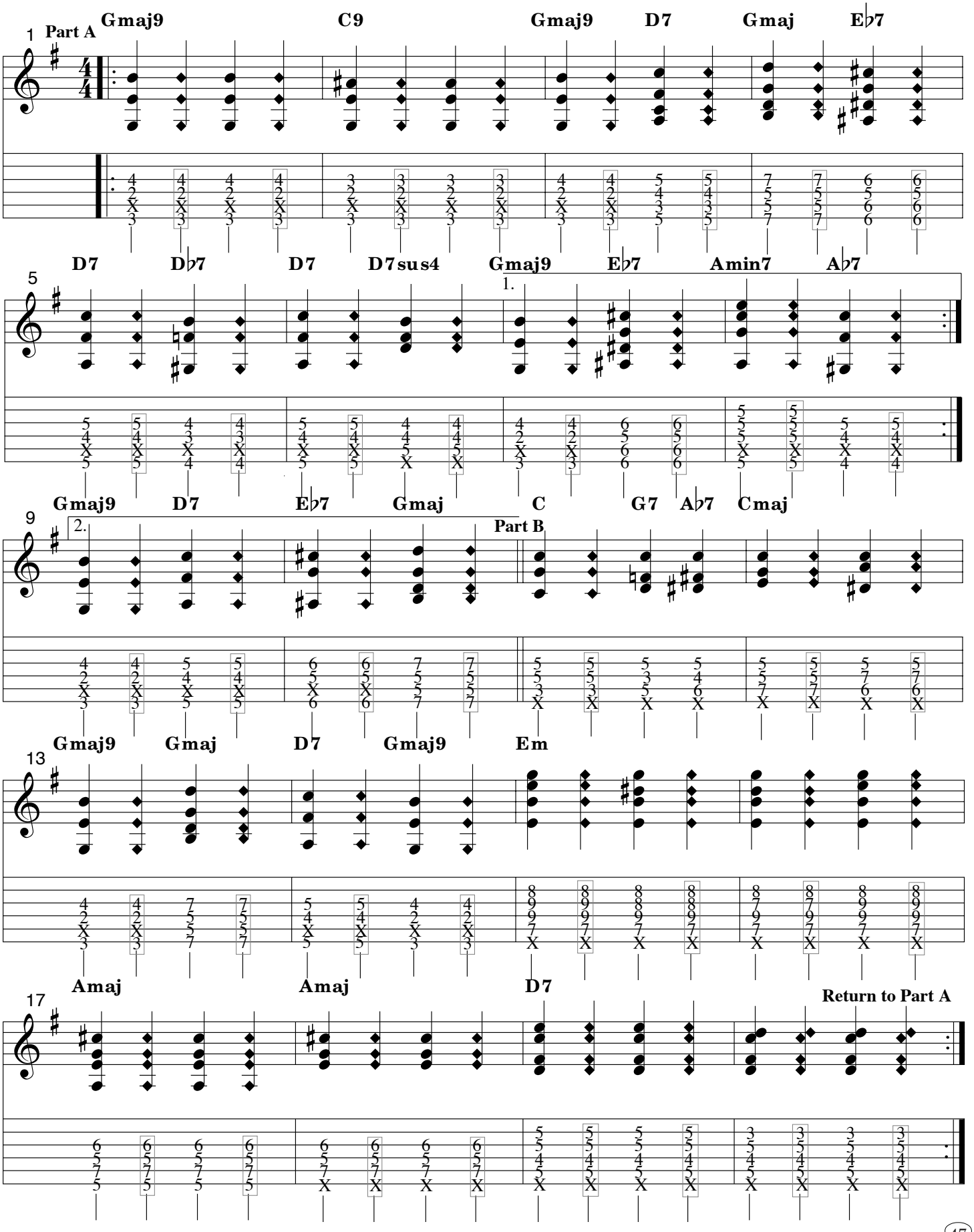
Where do you see the western music heading in the future?

Well, it's really hard to say—the Toy Story 2 movie is really our third wave. The first wave occurred with our first recordings and the Austin City Limits show. The second wave was the Saturday morning TV shows on CBS. As far as the music as a whole, there seemed to be a surge in the mid-nineties which has now died down a bit. As for us, our career looks great in the next few years. If people will keep coming to the shows, we'll keep playing.

On the next page we present a transcription of Ranger Doug's rhythm to "Lady Be Good." The diamond shapes shown in the standard notation, with the corresponding box around the chord form in the tablature, indicate a percussive chordal chop on the guitar. This percussive chop is executed by holding the chord form with your left hand, but immediately loosening the finger grip to mute the sound right after the right hand strums and thus dampening the strings and accenting the sound. Listen to the audio CD and then give it a try!

Lady Be Good - Rhythm

Arranged by Ranger Doug



THE O-ZONE

by Orrin Star

Lonesome Fiddle Blues

From the fiddling of Vassar Clements comes one of those tunes that almost certainly started out as an infectious little riff that was then teased into a whole. But guess what? Unlike most instrumentals created like this, it completely works; it's a classic.

I first heard "Lonesome Fiddle Blues" on New Grass Revival's ear-opening first album; my rendition here owes some of its melodic inspiration to Curtis Burch's playing on that record. (Others know it from the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* or—more commonly—from the snippet that is quoted in the country hit "Devil Went Down to Georgia.")

One hint: play this one with your left hand in "second position," (that is, fretting second fret notes with your index finger; third fret notes with your middle; and fourth fret notes with your ring).

Orrin Star has been performing professionally since the early 1970s. His musical history includes three bluegrass bands, a summer with banjo great Bill Keith, and eight years in a duo with Gary Mehalick. In 1976 he won the National Flatpicking Championship in Winfield, Kansas.

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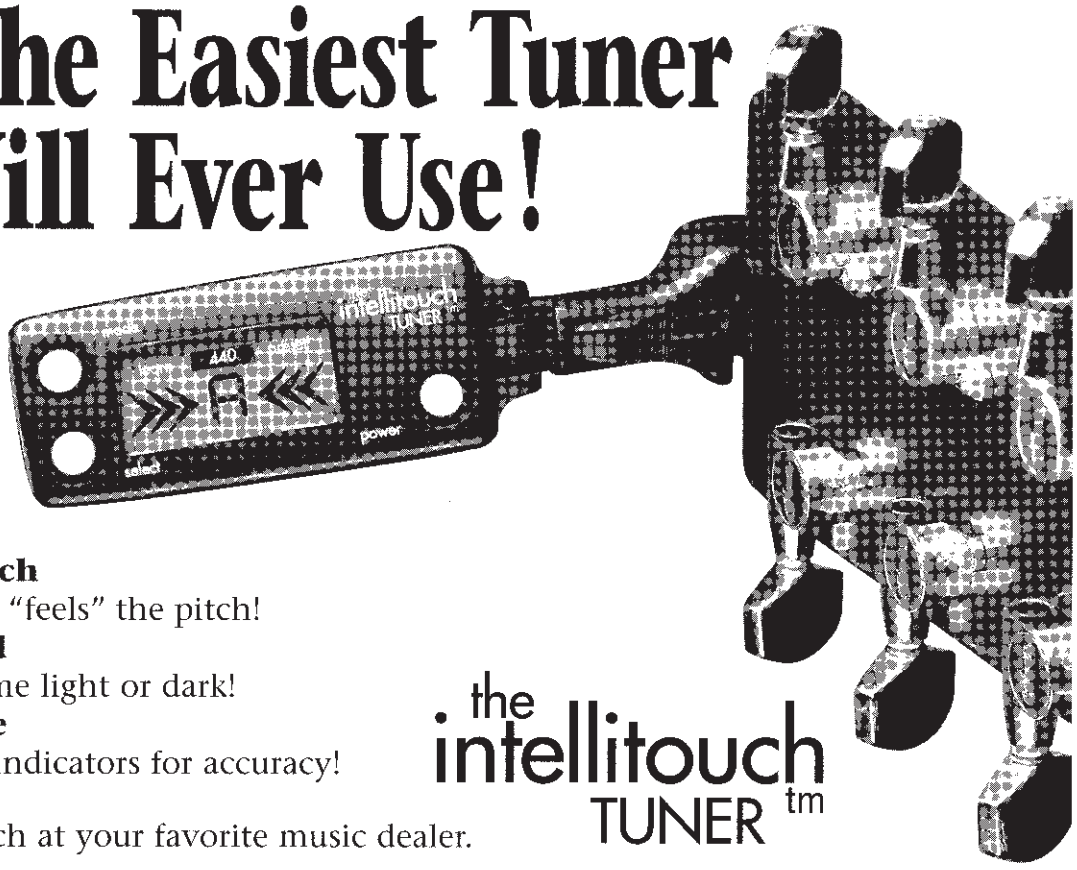

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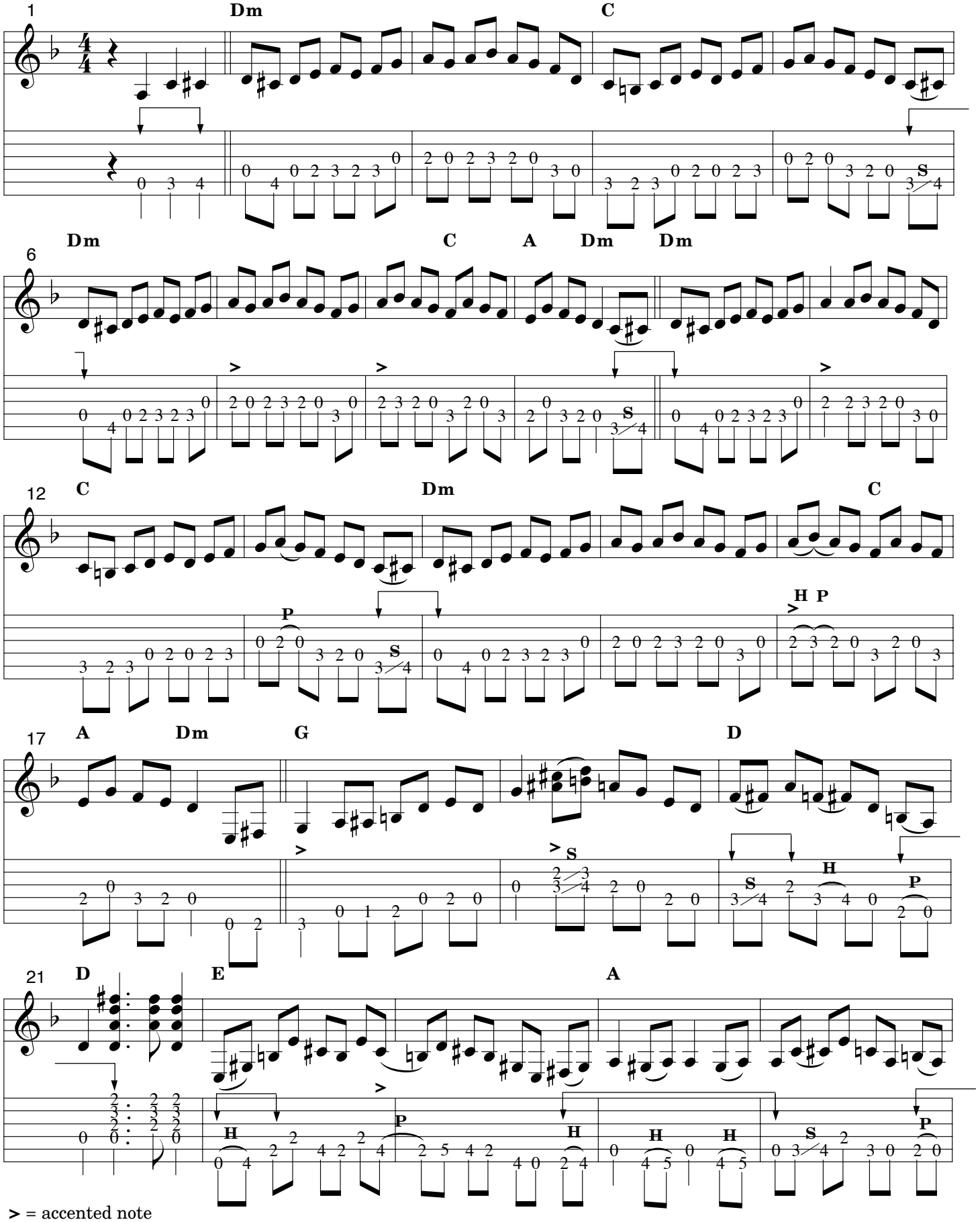
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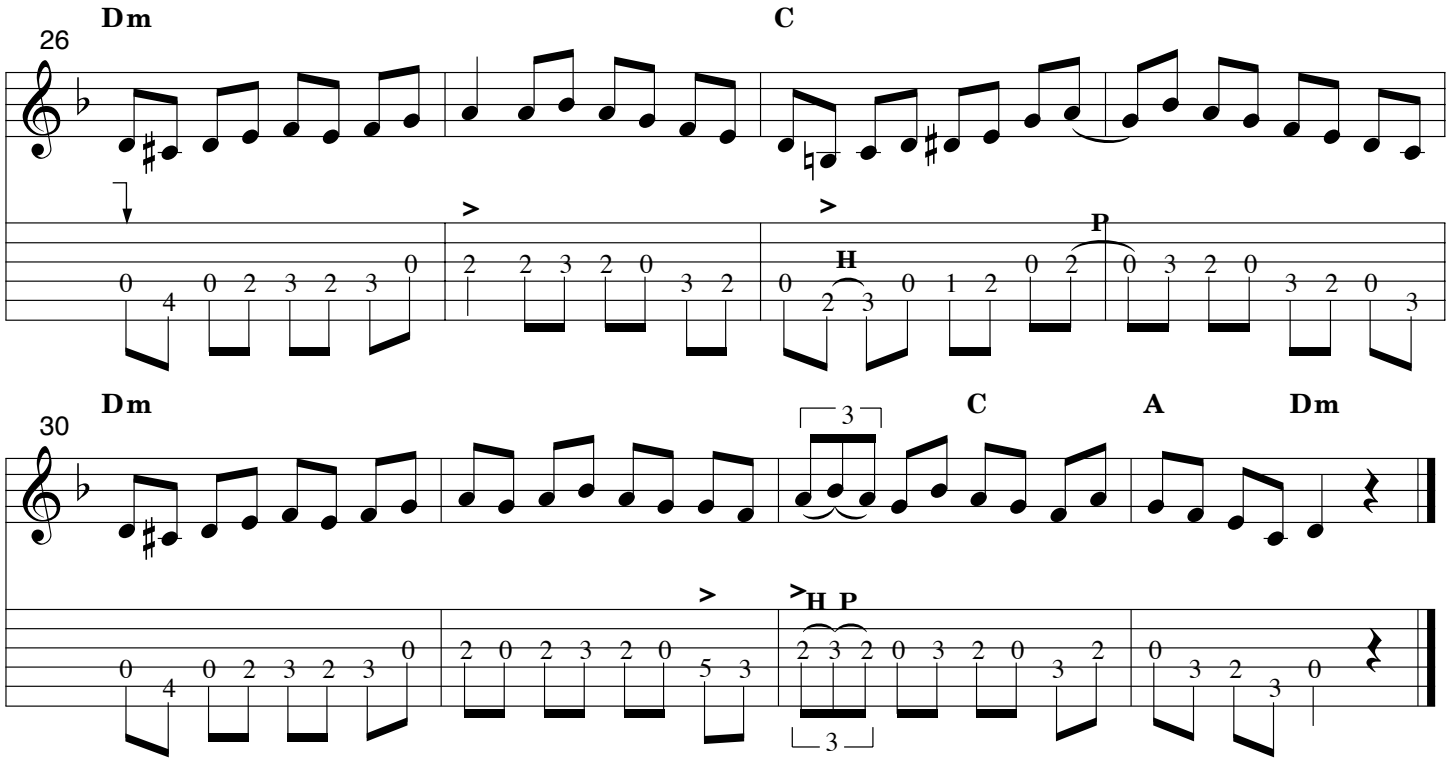
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The Delmore's "Blue Railroad Train"

by Dix Bruce

The legendary Delmore Brothers are one of the most exciting and important of the traditional country duos. Active in broadcasting, performing, and recording from the early 1930s until 1950, they influenced countless guitarists and singers and left a legacy of over two hundred recordings.

The Delmore family were sharecroppers and as tough as the music business was, it offered more possibilities than farming. Alton, the older brother by eight years and an accomplished musician, taught young Rabon to play the tenor guitar. By the time Rabon was ten years old, the brothers were performing in and around Limestone County, Alabama, at parties and dances. Their close vocal harmonies and engaging two guitar instrumental arrangements made them a popular duo.

In 1932 they auditioned for and won a slot on WSM's Grand Ole Opry. The weekly broadcasts brought them wider fame, a steady income, a chance to tour, and resulted in more recordings. The brothers composed much of their repertoire. Several of their songs, like "The Nashville Blues," "Brown's Ferry Blues," "Blues Stay Away from Me," "Don't You See That Train," "Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar," and "Blue Railroad Train," became country classics.

They reached their peak at WSM in Nashville but left in 1938 due to problems with alcohol. Thereafter they played on several southern and midwestern radio stations throughout the 1940s. By 1950 the duo had ceased performing. Rabon died from lung cancer in late 1952. Alton worked a variety of jobs until his death in 1964.

The Delmore's story has its sad points, but the strength and beauty of their music is evident to anyone who listens to their recordings. They had a unique sound both vocally and instrumentally. It featured close "brotherly" vocal harmonies and hot, often intricate guitar work that blended elements of the blues and more advanced harmony with traditional folk themes and subjects. Both Alton and Rabon were fine players and their combination of standard and tenor acoustic guitar, trading off on bluesy leads and rhythm, completed their unusual sound. Generally Rabon's lead tenor lines on a composed riff or solo forged the instrumental identity of a song.

The Delmore's repertoire is packed with great songs and wonderful guitar playing. One of my favorites is "Blue Railroad Train." Below I've transcribed two solos, which I believe are played by Alton on a standard tuned guitar while Rabon plays rhythmic fills on the tenor guitar in the background.

I've written the solos out in the key of E, which might be a little unusual to those of you who primarily play fiddle tunes. The key of E sounds great on the guitar, especially with the tonal possibilities offered by the low E (open sixth string). The recording of "Blue Railroad Train" is in the key of F. The Delmores may have tuned sharp or the master recording may have been speeded up. Hearing the low sixth string E leads me to believe that Alton played the lead out of an E position. They may have capoed at the first fret so if you want to play along with the recording, you should do the same.

In many of the Delmore's arrangements, the approach is to play a composed instrumental break or solo as an introduction to the song as well as between each verse with slight variations. There's very little improvisation, except within the framework of the composed solo. This was typical of much of the country music of their era.

This approach reaches out to an audience. The repetition provides a hook that allows the listener to learn the piece, especially instrumentally, as it's being performed and they are perhaps hearing it for the first time. It quickly becomes familiar and the audience is brought along with the performance. The slight variations keep the interest high without losing the audience. We all like to stand on stage and just "blow" ... make it up as we go along ... improvise. Sometimes that's good and sometimes it's not so good. It's almost always fun for the player, but it sometimes leaves the audience behind. These early country musicians had a different concept and the most successful ones were the best entertainers. The best entertainers brought their music directly to the audience by simplifying it and making it as immediately understandable and possible. Sometimes I think we as players lose that sense of audience in our efforts to play hot, fast, and original.

"Blue Railroad Train" follows this composed solo / verse pattern. I've transcribed two of the solos so you can compare and see how subtle the changes are between them.

The solo itself is ten measures long. You might expect it to be eight, twelve, or sixteen measures, which is the more usual length. And, unlike the structure of so many country or folk songs, the solo is not based on the vocal melody or even played over the vocal chord progression. Rather it's a separate part altogether.

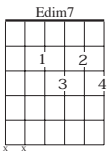
As you play the solos, keep your fretting hand in the basic shape of the E chord. Most of the notes are reachable from this form and those that require movement will need less if you hold this basic shape. I added fretting finger numbers in just a few spots where they may not be clear. In M 7 & 8; 18 &19, you'll have to go out of the basic E shape to reach these notes.

You'll find some "blue" notes in M 2, 4, 6 & 7, mainly the G natural. We call these G natural notes "blue" because they'd usually be G sharps in the key of E major. When we flat the G sharps and lower them one half step to G naturals, we make them into "blue" notes.

The first note of solo 1 (M1) is an arpeggiated E chord so drag your pick across the strings and end on the open first string. Both solos consist mostly of single string notes with a very few chord strums

here and there. Solo #1 concludes in M 10 and solo #2 begins in M11. Solo #2 is repeated almost exactly for solos 3 and 4 on the recording. There are a couple of great extended bass runs in these solos, in M 8 and M 18. Once you learn them, try applying them to other songs which have an E chord. Once you can do that, transpose the licks to work over other chords.

You'll need to know how to play an E diminished seven chord to accompany M 7, 9, 17, & 19. Shown below, it's an interesting chord that can be named by any note in it. So, since you're playing E, G, Bb, and Db notes, this chord can be named E dim 7, G dim 7, Bb dim 7, or Db dim 7. The "x" under the chord diagram means to not play that string.



You can clearly hear the tenor rhythm punctuate the lead work in the fourth measure of each solo. You can also hear a nice tenor rhythmic fill after the lyric "Take me on down the line." Notice the timbre of the higher chord inversion on the tenor guitar.

As I mentioned, more often than not in a Delmore Brothers recording, the tenor guitar is playing the lead line. Rabon plays some challenging and interesting things that are worthy of study. One of these days we'll look at a transcription of one of his tenor solos which are completely playable on a standard tuned six string guitar. But don't wait for me to get around to it, dive right in and start transcribing on your own. There are several great collections of Delmore Brothers recordings. I'm partial to the earlier 1930s material but all of the recordings have great music, great songs, singing, and hot guitar picking. County has a CD collection of the Delmore Brothers entitled *Brown's Ferry Blues* (CCS-CD-116).

I always enjoy hearing from you guitar players. Write me c/o Musix, PO Box 231005, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523 or e-mail: MUSIX1@aol.com).

Dix Bruce is a musician and writer from the San Francisco Bay Area. Mel Bay has just released Bruce's "Great Mandolin Pickin' Tunes" book and CD set of old time, jazz, Irish, Italian, classical, and more. The book / CD set sells for $5.95 plus shipping. Bay has also released two great collections Bruce worked on entitled "2000 Flatpicking: Solos by the World's Finest Flatpicking Guitarists." and "2000 Mandolin: Solos by the World's Finest Mandolinists." Each book (over 200 pages) includes two CDs of the work of Rice, Crary, Grier, Watson, Nygaard, Blake, Bruce, Nunally, Barenberg, and more (Flatpicking book). Each book / 2 CD set sells for $29.95 plus shipping. For details and availability contact Musix, PO Box 231005, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523 • email: musix1@aol.com or call toll-free: 877-219-0441. Bruce has just completed a book for Mel Bay Publication entitled "How to Use the Capo, How to Transpose, and How the Nashville Number System Works." It will be available in Fall 2000.

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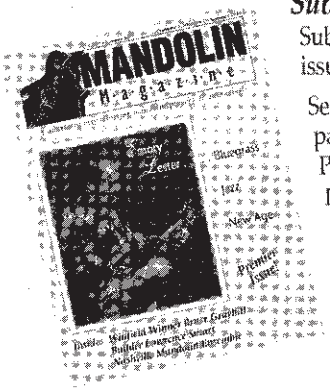

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Blue Railroad Train

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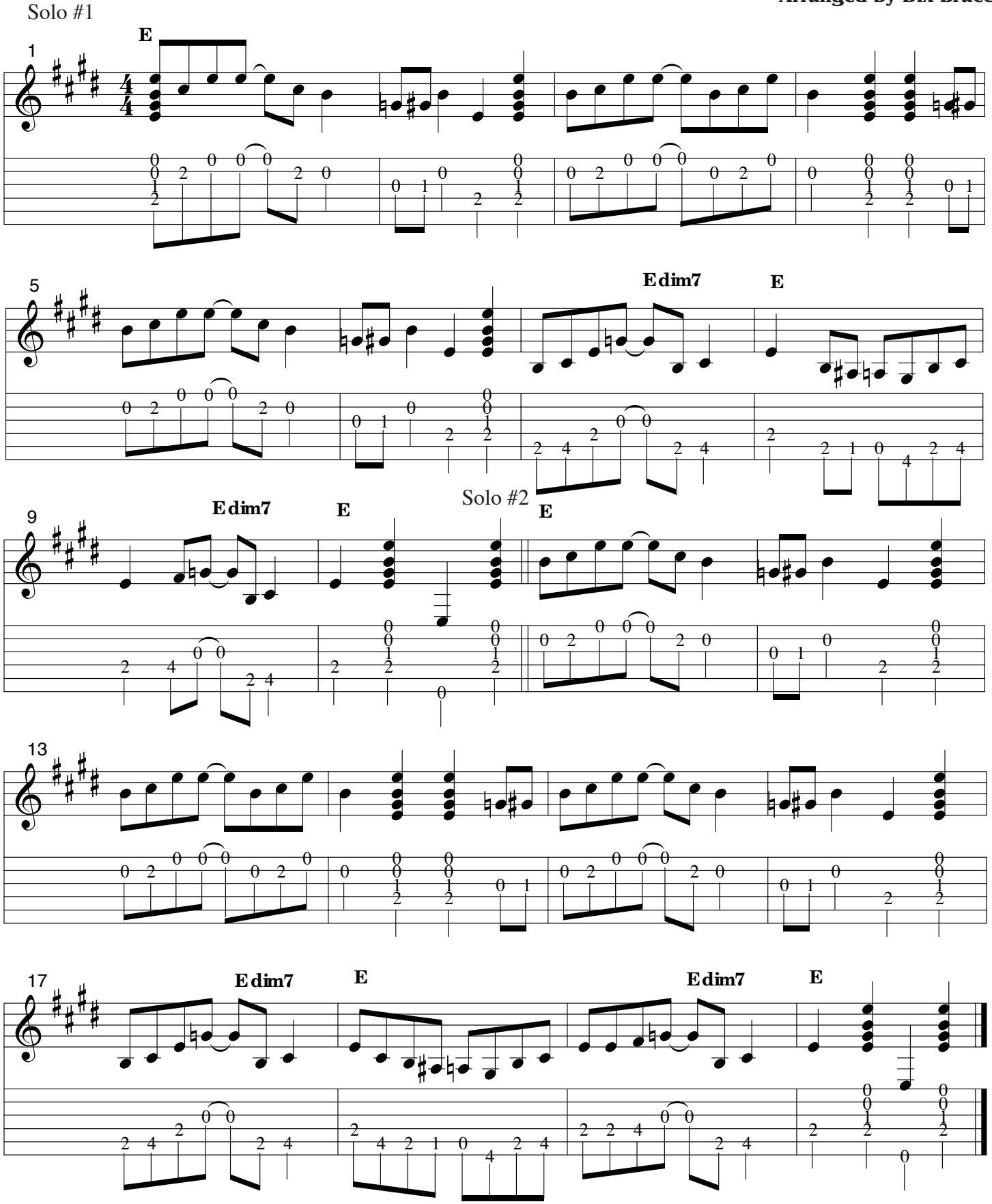

Music Theory: Mastering the Fingerboard

Technical Studies for Flatpickers. Alternate and painful fingerings...

by Michel A. Maddux

The student of the guitar is also a student of music. As a regular reader of this column you have worked through and practiced the exercises and scale forms presented. I hope that you have memorized and made these forms a regular part of your daily practice.

We have examined in detail the major scale, and learned how to finger and play major forms in first position, in extended positions, with open string scales, and using moveable forms. We have studied the relationship between the major scale and its relative minor, spent a bit of time on the blues scale and some other forms. By now you're probably asking, is that it?

Well, don't worry, there is more. Joe Pass wrote, "Music is an enormous subject, and no one can claim to know everything about it." The best that we can do is to become, each of us, the best musician that we can be through diligent study and practice.

Relationship of Scales to Chords:

The basic chord types are major, seventh, minor, augmented, and diminished. These types are the "fathers" of the other chords, and nearly all (except for altered chords) can be considered to be derived from the basic types.

For example, a C7 chord, also called a dominant chord, uses the notes C, E, G, Bb, C. It is derived from the basic C Major chord by adding a flat seventh to the major triad.

Chords and the Scale Degree:

For an introduction to these extended forms, let's review first the scale steps in the major scale.

You will recall that the notes in the C major scale are: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C These notes can be numbered, 1 through 8, as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 Notice that the C repeats with the 8th note; this is also called the octave.

The distance between the notes for the major scale is constant for all keys.

```
C D  E  F  G  A  B  C
\ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ /
 W  W  H  W  W  W  H
```

Notice that the scale has 5 whole steps (W), and two half steps (H). The half steps in a major scale always occur, independently of the key in which you are playing, between the 3rd and 4th steps, and between the 7th and 8th steps.

Look at the guitar fingerboard. Start on a C. Notice that when notes are a single fret apart, the musical distance is a half step, as in C to C#. When the notes are two frets apart, for example, from C (A string, third fret) to D (A string, fifth fret) the notes are musically a whole step apart, C to D. In first position, (that is, with the index finger covering notes on the first fret), we commonly play this whole step by playing the C on the A string, third fret, and then play the D string open.

Chords and Inversions:

In common chord use on the guitar, the root may be repeated, and some chords may repeat other notes as well. For example, when all six strings are played, the first position C major chord uses the notes G-C-E-G-C-E. By the way, when the G is in the bass, as in the previous example, this chord is also called the "second inversion" of the C chord. A "first inversion" chord is one that has the third scale step in the bass. In the key of C, that would be the E in the bass, as in: E-G-C. First inversion chords have the third in the bass, and second inversion chords have the fifth in the bass. When we study inversions this will be important. For now, it is enough that you have been introduced to the concept of inversion.

Major Chords:

Three note chords are called a triad. The major triad has the notes: 1, 3, 5. In the key of C, this means the notes are: C, E, G Forms derived from the major triad are:

Major: 1-3-5—written C—C-E-G
Major 6: 1-3-5-6—written C6— C-E-G-A
Major 7th: 1-3-5 and ma7—written CM7—C-E-G-B
Added 9th: 1-3-5- and ma7 and 9 written Cadd9—C-E-G-B-D
6th/9th: 1-3-5 and 6 and 9—written C6/9—C-E-G-A-D

Seventh Chords:

The seventh chord is also called the dominant chord.

7th: 1-3-5-7—written C7—C-E-G-Bb
9th: 1-3-5-7-9—written C9—C-E-G-Bb-D
11th: 1-3-5-7-9-11—written C11— C-E-G-Bb-D-F
13th 1-3-5-7-9-13—written C13—C-E-G-Bb-D-A

Note that although in theory the 3rd and 9th are contained in the 11th and 13th chords, they are commonly omitted from guitar fingerings. Likewise, the 11th is normally omitted from the 13th chord. It may assist you to remember 9, 11, 13, is the same notes as 2, 4, 6. For example: D-F-A.

Minor Triad and Scale Explanation:

The minor triad is a modification of the major triad by playing the flat third, also called the minor third, instead of the third. This means, in the key of C, that you play an Eb instead of the E.

Minor chords are formed in a similar fashion to the major chords shown above.

Minor Chords:

Minor: 1-mi3-5—written Cm— C-Eb-G
Minor 6th: 1-mi3-5 and 6—written Cm6 —C-Eb-G-A
Minor (ma7th): 1-mi3-5 and ma7—written Cm+7 -- C-Eb-G-B

The minor seventh chords are formed by using the minor 7th with the minor chord.

Minor Seventh Chords:

Minor 7th: 1-mi3-5-7—written Cm7—C-Eb-G-Bb
Minor 9th: 1-mi3-5-7-and 9—written Cm9 —C-Eb-G-Bb-D
Minor 11th: 1-mi3-5-7-and 11—written Cm11—C-Eb-G-Bb-F

The minor scales developed in the seventeenth century from the Aeolian and Dorian modes.

There are three forms of minor scales: the harmonic, natural, and melodic. They differ from each other only in their sixth and seventh tones. The first five tones of all minor scales follow the pattern, in whole and half steps, of 1-1/2-1-1. The harmonic minor continues, 1/2-11/2-1/; the natural minor continues, 1/2-1-1; and the ascending form of the melodic minor continues, 1-1-1/2; the descending form of the melodic minor follows the pattern of the natural minor.

The key signature of a minor scale is the same as that of its relative major scale a minor third avove. C minor, for example, uses the signature of Eb major; A minor uses the signature of C major, and so forth.

Diminished Seventh:

The diminished seventh chord, commonly called a diminished chord, is built by flatting all but the root of a 7th chord. Note that the double flat 7th note is the same note as the sixth.

C7: 1-3-5-7—C-E-G-Bb
Cdim - 1-b3-b5-bb7 (6)—C-Eb-Gb-A

may also be written Cdim, Cdim7, C7dim, C°, C°7, C7°

Note that the diminished scale features a regular pattern of whole and half steps. Because of this regular pattern it is considered a symmetrical scale.

In addition to being used over diminished seventh chords, the diminished scale is often used over dominant seventh chords. When used in this way, the root of the scale should be one half-step above the root of the seventh chord. Thus, a C diminished scale works over a B7 chord. We will cover uses of the diminished scale form in more detail in a future column.

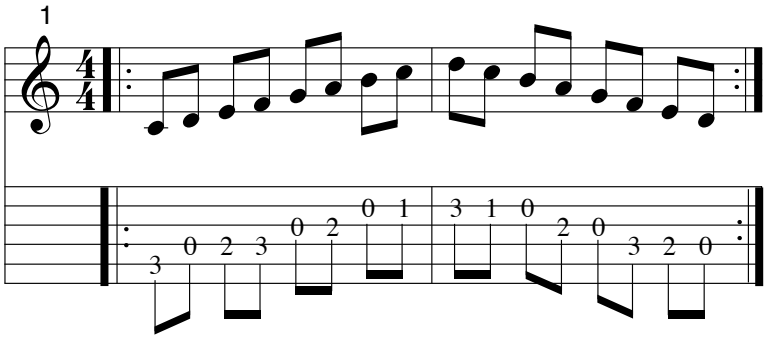
Augmented Chords:

The augmented triad uses the raised, or sharped 5th.
C+, Caug: 1-3-#5—C-E-G#
C+7, C7+, C7aug: 1-3-#5-7—C-E-G#-Bb

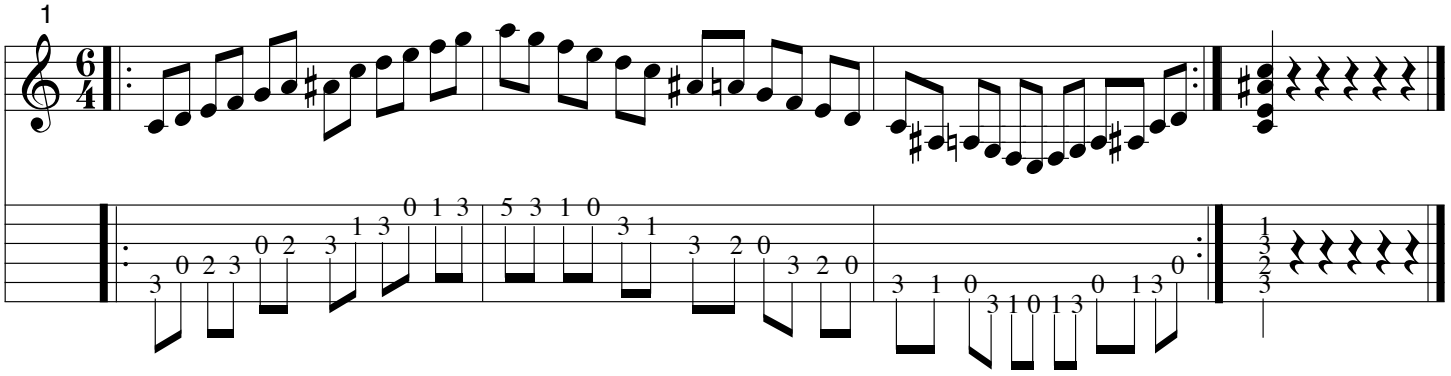
Whew, well, where can I use all of that? I have provided an example using the major, minor, diminished, and augmented scales to play a fiddle tune in C (8th of January). Note that you might not choose to do this for every form in the same tune; what I've shown here is designed to stimulate some thinking. Make up your own uses for these forms and have fun.

That's enough for this time. Have fun and keep on pickin'!

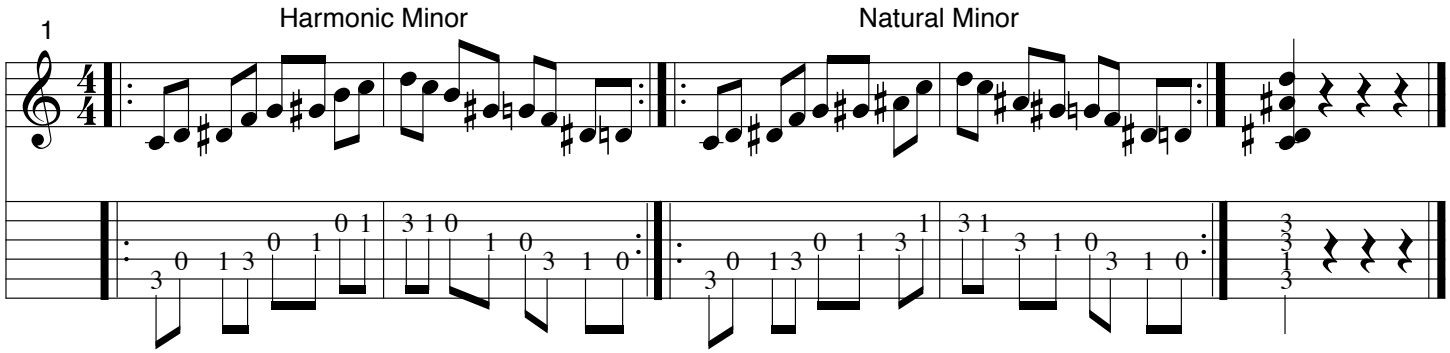
C Major Scale exercise using major 7th, and 9th. Repeat 8 - 16 times: Note: B is the major 7th; D is the 9th



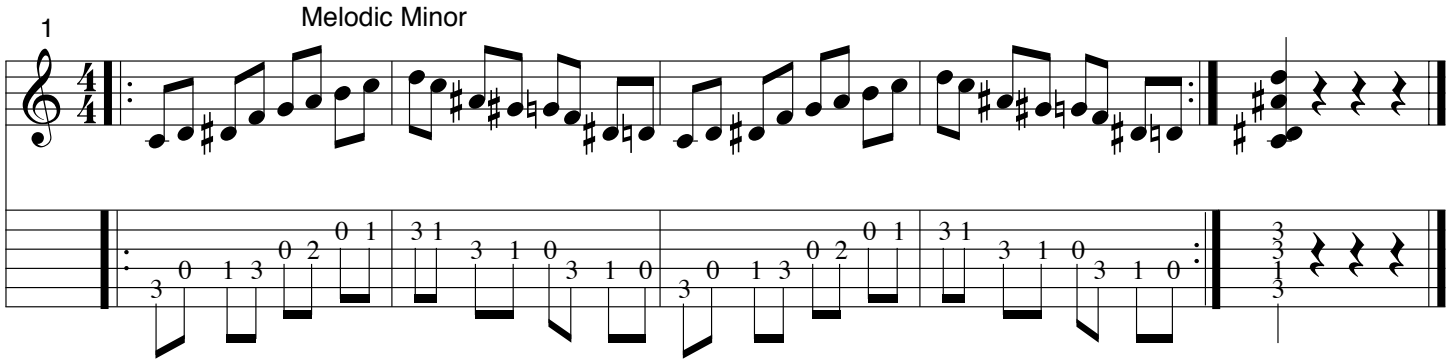
C Major Scale exercise using the dominant, or flat 7, 11th and 13th. Repeat 8 - 16 times: Note: F is the 11th, A is the 13th.



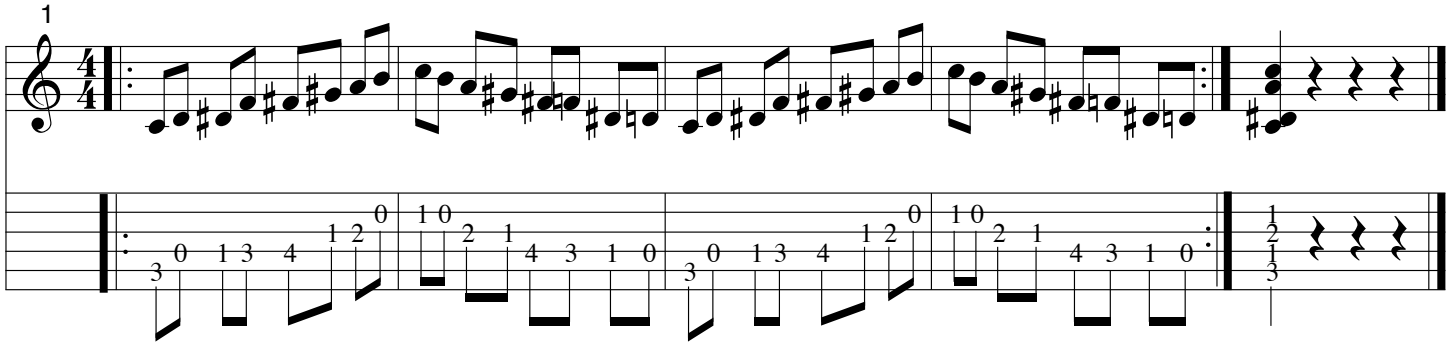
C Harmonic Minor and natural minor exercise. Repeat 8 - 16 times:



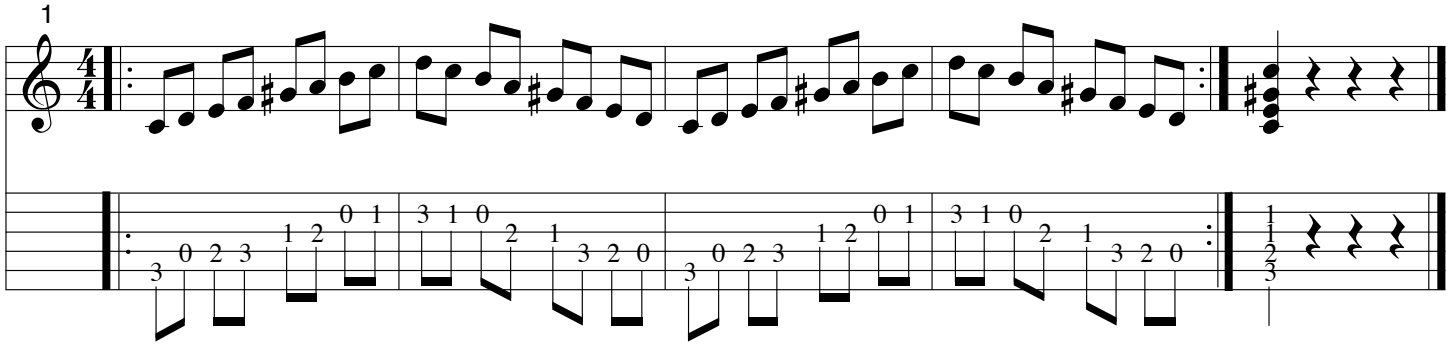
C Melodic Minor exercise. Repeat 8 - 16 times: Note that the descending form of the Melodic Minor follows the form of the natural minor.



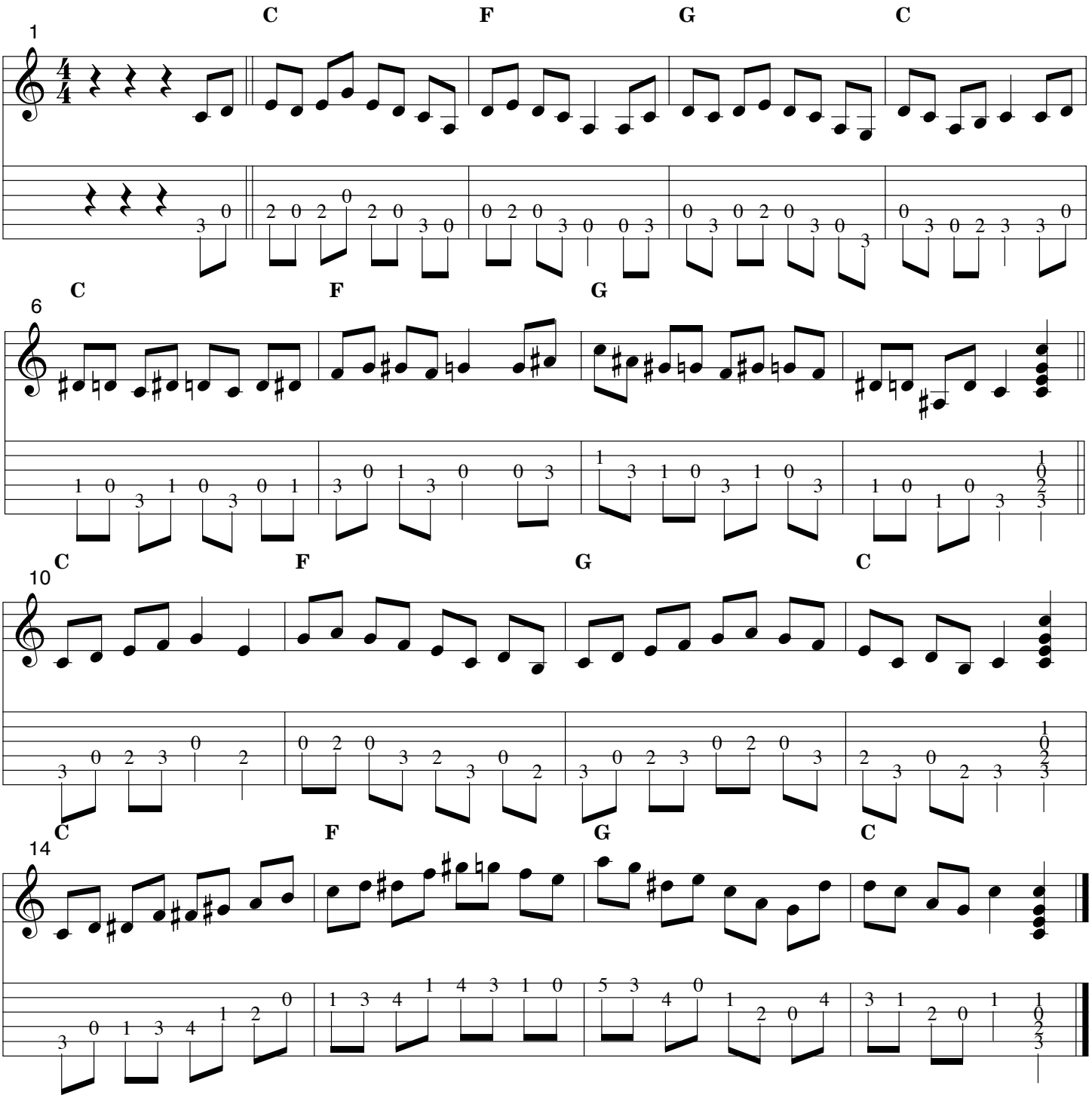
C Diminished seventh scale exercise. Repeat 8 - 16 times:



C Augmented scale exercise. Repeat 8 - 16 times:



8th of January

Arranged by Mike Maddux

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Gospel Guitar

with Harold Streeter

Potpourri

It's time for a confession. I'm not really a flatpicker...or at least, except for recording instructional material and teaching, I hadn't been one for some 25 years until just recently. About a year ago, though, just a few months prior to being asked by Dan Miller to do this column (Dan doesn't know any of this...well, I guess he does now), I had an ephipany of sorts and rediscovered how great everything sounds when played with a flatpick...compared with fingerstyle, that is. You may well be thinking; "What else is new?"

To explain, my first guitar experiences back in the late '50's involved flatpicking. It wasn't long before I was flatpicking leads in Ventures style rock bands and Carter style country groups. Back then, we also had a lot of flat pick jazz and pop guitarists for inspiration such as Johnny Smith, Howard Roberts, and Hank "Sugarfoot" Garland (he also played fiddle tunes, most notably "Sugarfoot Rag"). And when it came to fiddle tunes, really dazzling fiddle tunes, we had Jimmy Bryant, a true virtuoso who's still rises above most of us today. He recorded in the late '50's and early '60's, and played many of the same fiddle tunes we all try to play today, except back then, he played his on a Fender Strat.

For me, though, it all soon gave way to fingerstyle, with the rationale that being God gave me all those fingers, they should be put to use. There were all kinds of fingerstyle heroes to emulate back then as well, such as Chet and Merle. What followed was playing fingerstyle in every situation imaginable; rock bands, jazz and country groups, and lots of background music - including a four hour per night-six nights a week classical guitar stint a few years ago that lasted for four years. Soon after that job, or probably because of that job, I discovered that just holding onto a pick for more than five minutes was a painful experience. Don't know what it was, and don't really care, but at the time I figured flat picking was out of the question for me. After learning how to hold a pick again so as to at least hit what I was aiming at, however, my more recent attempts at flatpicking were, to say the least, a pleasant surprise. Here endeth the confession - I've seen the light.

Before getting into the song at hand, just one more digression. A fellow guitarist gave me a book recently entitled *Music and Ministry—a Biblical Counterpoint*. If you're active in your church's music program, this book may be a big help in forming a proper perspective toward church music in general. The book's profound message and premise has caused me to rethink a lot of musical goals, whether they involve arranging existing pieces or writing new ones. The author is Calvin M. Johansson, a church music director for over 40 years, and it's published by Hendrickson Publishers. No address was given, and as it was a gift, don't know the price—none was included in the book.

I Am a Pilgrim

The song this time around, the old Gospel blues tune "I Am a Pilgrim," is somewhat of a departure from those in previous columns in that it includes a fair amount of cross picking, but no Carter style.

I've no idea how "I Am a Pilgrim" began life but as is probably the case with many pickers, my first hearing was Merle Travis' version. Whether most of the credit should go to Merle for propagating the tune's popularity or not, its identity with Travis picking is almost on a par with another of Merle's signature pieces; "Nine Pound Hammer." I'm also not sure of the point at which "I Am a Pilgrim" entered the bluegrass lexicon, but it's been a bluegrass staple for some time now. Travis pickers usually play it in the key of E, whereas the key of choice for bluegrassers is G, just as presented here.

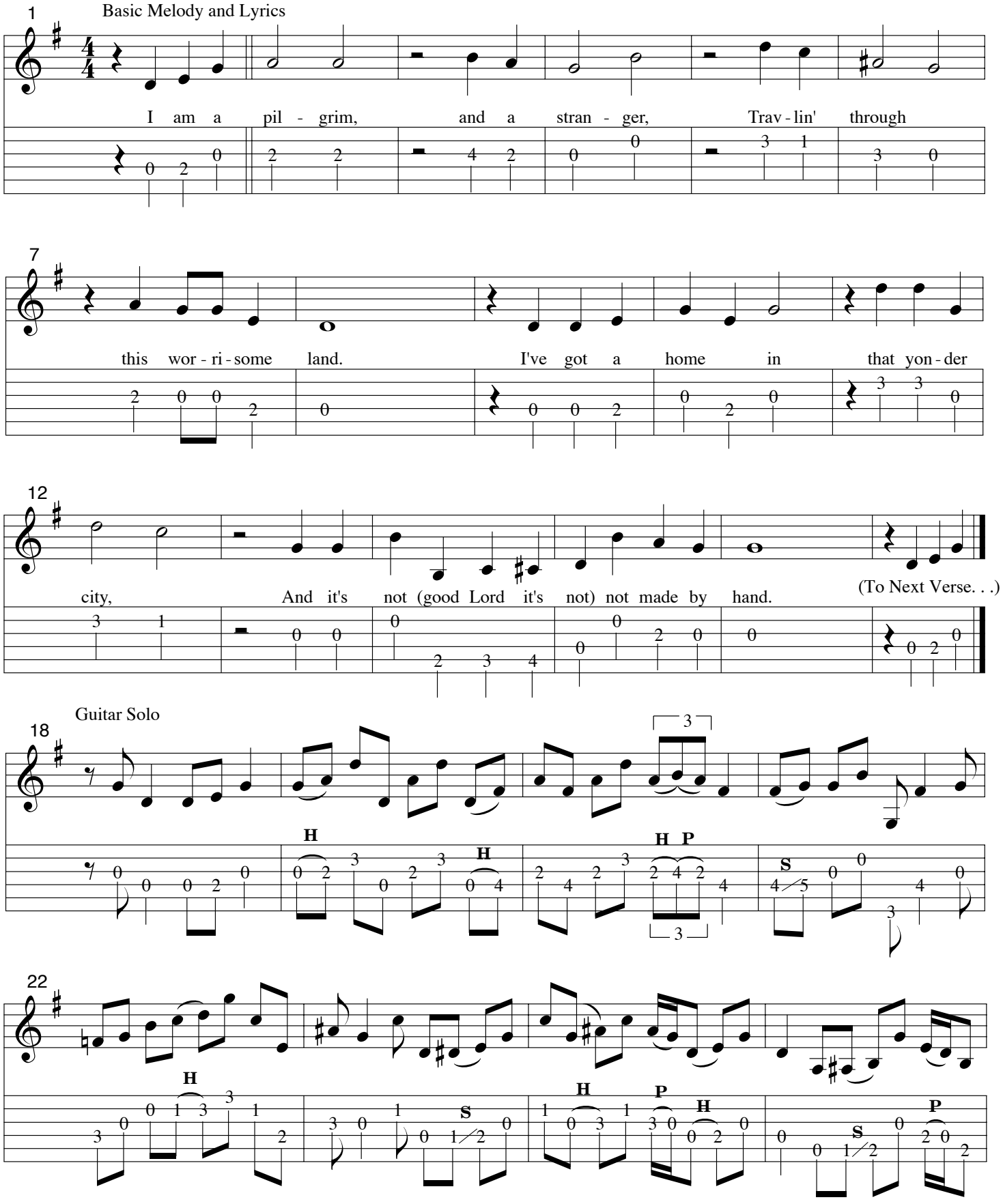
In that "I Am a Pilgrim" is a somewhat ambiguous tune, we begin with a basic melody that's a composite of various versions, just in case you're either not familiar with the piece, or just need a set of lyrics. It may come in handy as a reference because this treatment is faithful to the melody only part of the time. That's perhaps as it should be because this is a 16-bar break, one that's in keeping with blues tradition and flavor that's to be played in the middle of an otherwise vocal tune.

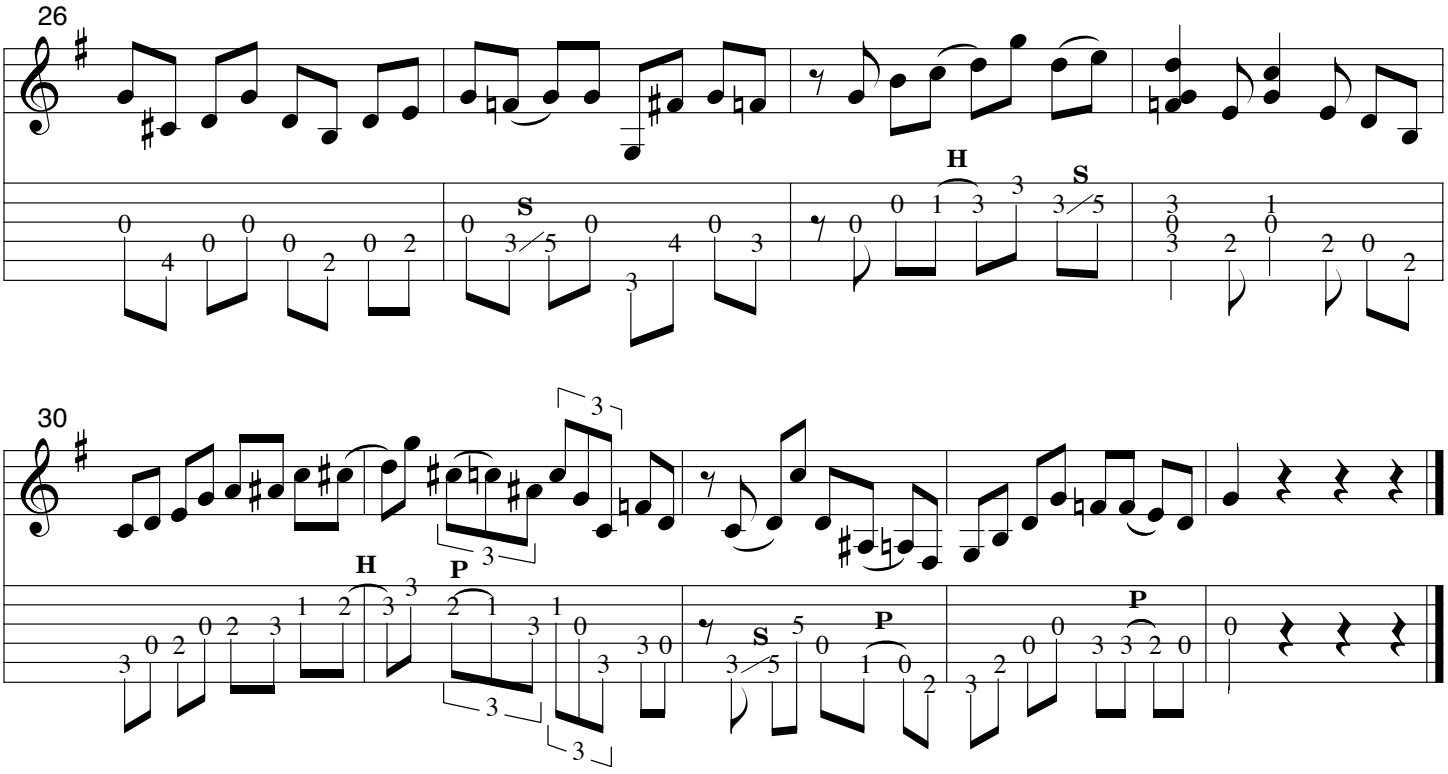
Moving on to the break itself, there's a few measures you may wish to spend some extra time with, such as the ones containing cross picking. They are measures 2, 3, 5, and 9. In addition, there's a fancified tag lick in measure 8 that's worthy of mention. If you're of an age to have grown up listening to Ernest Tubb's records, you may recall his lead guitarist, Billy Byrd. He developed a signature tag lick that he usually played at the end of every verse. In the beginning, it was even simpler than the classic Lester Flatt "G run," but either he or his later replacement "upgraded" the lick to what you see here.

As is the case with many of the old tunes, there's no attempt to state the melody in the last few measures. First is measure 14, a Tony Rice idea that contains an extra triplet. It may take some time to get comfortable with this one, but the effect is certainly worth the effort. Measure 16 is another Tony Rice idea (at least it pops up in his guitar duet with Don Reno on "Freight Train Boogie") that's really a banjo tag. Don't know who got there first, either Don or Earl Scruggs, but it works well on guitar, and it's not really all that difficult.

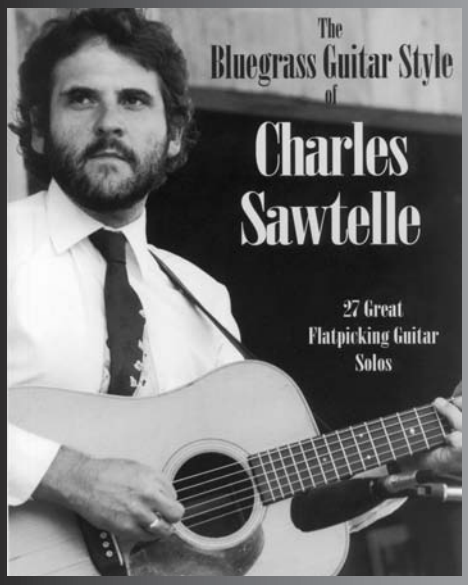
If you have any suggestions for songs you'd like to see in this column, please write me at 4950 East 20th Ave, Post Falls, Idaho 83854, U.S.A. If you'd like a free catalog of flat pick and fingerstyle tabs, just write to the same address.

I Am A Pilgrim

Arranged by Harold Streeter

1
Basic Melody and Lyrics
I am a pil - grim, and a stran - ger, Trav - lin' through
7
this wor - ri - some land. I've got a home in that yon - der
12
city, And it's not (good Lord it's not) not made by hand.
(To Next Verse. . .)
Guitar Solo
18
22

I Am A Pilgrim (con't)

Second Verse:
I've got a mother, a sister and a brother,
Who have gone on before.
And I'm determined to go and meet them, good Lord,
Over on that other shore.

Third Verse:
I'm going down to the river of Jordan,
Just to cleanse my weary soul.
If I could touch the hem of His garment, good Lord,
I do believe it would make me whole.



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William Bay is president of Mel Bay Publications, Inc. He is an accomplished trumpet player and guitarist and has performed professionally on both instruments. He is best known, however, for his writing, having authored well over 100 books covering a diverse assortment of musical topics and with sales in the millions.

The Eleven-Mile Canyon is a place in Colorado off Highway 24 near Woodland Park. There is a lake there appropriately named the "Eleven-Mile Reservoir."

My dad had several cabins at the lake. Actually, one of the cabins used to belong to the renowned jazz guitarist Johnny Smith. Johnny would come out and go fishing with my father every summer. Of course, Dad wasn't much of a fisherman, although he like the idea of it. I think he calculated at one time that if he divided all the money he spent on cabins, property and boats out there by the number of fish he caught, it would have cost him something like $25,000.00 per fish!

The tune was originally written as a flatpicking guitar solo. I added a harmony part last year. Be careful in the harmony part. The first ending is a little tricky, since it involves a little bit of crosspicking. The tune sounds best when played at a lively tempo.

Mel Bay Publications . . .

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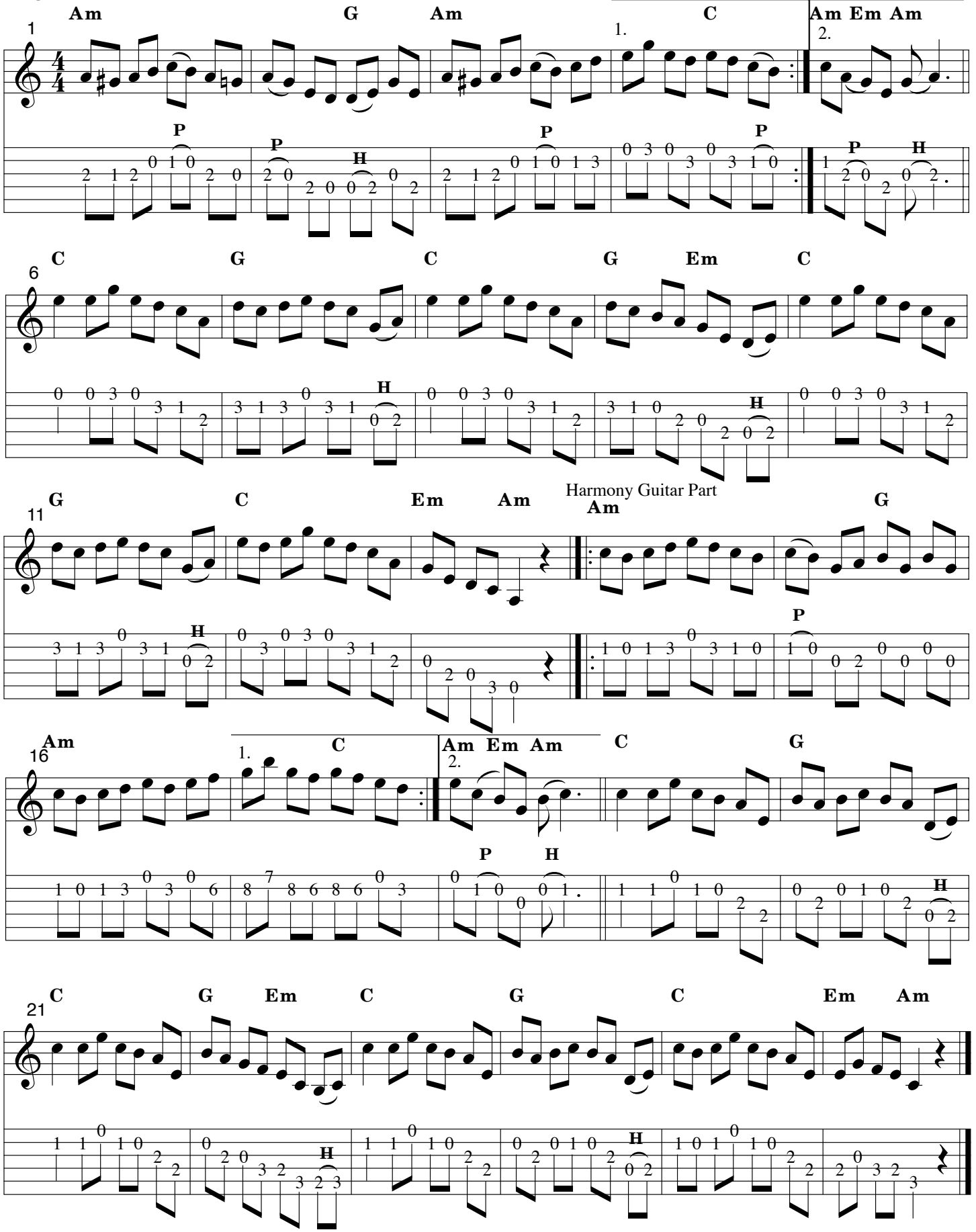
Eleven Mile Canyon

Written by Bill Bay

1st Guitar Part

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PICKIN' FIDDLE TUNES
by Adam Granger

FORKY DEER & CO

I awoke with a start the other night. I'd had a dream that I'm at the pearly gates and St Peter, upon studying my file, summarizes: "I'm sorry, Mr Granger. Maybe if you'd done a second variation column. . ." Well, I can't do much about the sins in my past, but by golly I can confront the nemesis in my dream: Let's eviscerate the old chestnut *Forky Deer* and, in so doing, help pave my road to the pearly gates.

This tune has been around the block more times than a forgetful mailman. It's a classic flatpick jam tune, the knowledge of which will enrich your life, and the lives of everyone within earshot of you, beyond measure.

We're going to examine four different versions of *Forky Deer* (also known, by the way, as *Forked Deer* and *Forked Buck*). The first is a straight-ahead garden-variety bluegrass/flatpick treatment, almost identical to that found in *Granger's Fiddle Tunes for Guitar*. Next is an old-timey setting, followed by a variation and, finally, a lower-octave version.

An exploration of all four of these by you, the intrepid flatpicker, will result in a greater understanding of what makes fiddle tunes tick (besides the metronome, which I hope you're using on a regular basis!) It'll also help you understand what constitutes the old-timey style, *versus* the bluegrass style, and will generally make you a better human being. Ready? Let's pick!

READING *EASY-TAB*

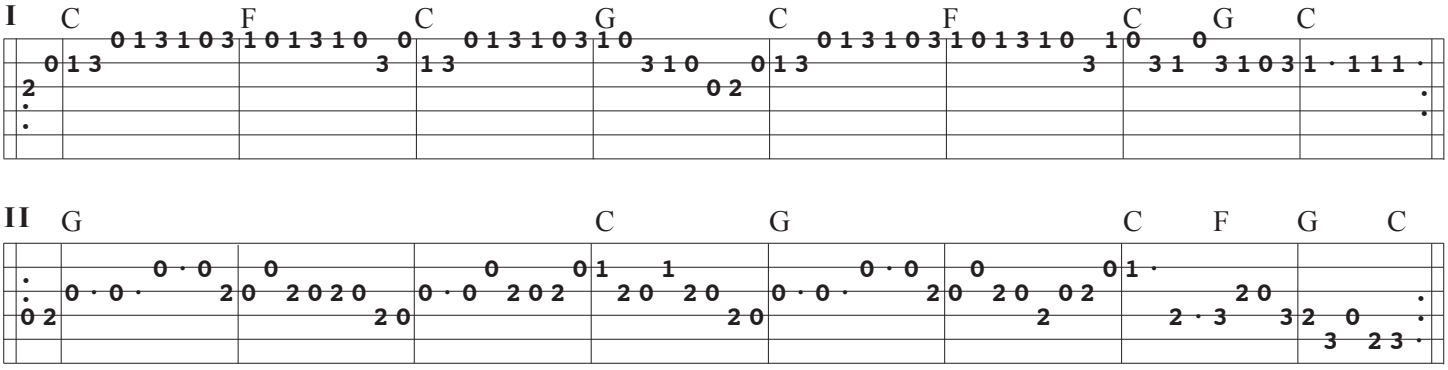
Easytab is like conventional tablature, except that timing notation has been streamlined and simplified. Since fiddle tunes are comprised mainly of eighth notes, Easytab uses the eighth note as its basic unit. An eighth rest is indicated by a dot. Therefore, a note with a dot after it is a quarter note, and a note with three dots after it is a half note. There are a total of eight notes and rests

FOR BEGINNERS

Pick with an alternating style: down-up-down-up-down-up etc. The first note of each measure should be a downstroke, the last an upstroke. **Include rests** in this alternating pattern. This keeps you "in synch", playing downstrokes on the beats, so that, no matter what the configuration of notes and rests in an eight-unit measure, the right hand plays them down-up-down-up-down-up-

FORKED DEER

KEY: D (CAPO 2)



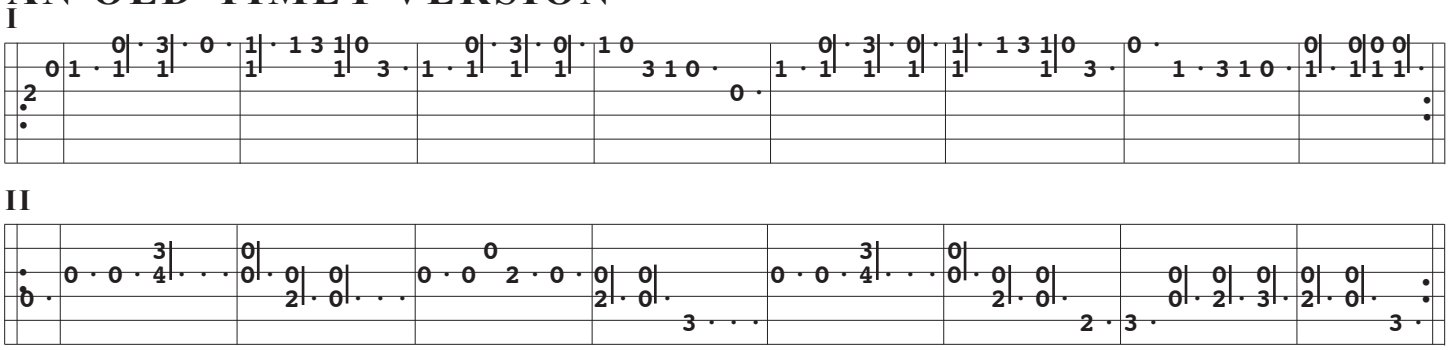
There now; that wasn't so bad, was it? You no doubt picked up on the fact that, although this is a D tune, we're capoing two and playing out of a C position. Note also that we modulated to the V chord (*i.e.*, G) for the second part (see below). Other than that, there's no voodoo here: It's all in first position and uses finger-per-fret zone coverage.

ABOUT MODULATIONS

When a fiddle tune modulates, it's generally at the start of its second part, and the modulation is usually to the V chord (next most common is the relative minor, *viz Blackberry Blossom*). Having modulated, the progression must at some point return to its I chord. If this doesn't happen, one is left with the same sense of unfinished business that would be created by ending a song on its next-to-last chord. Anyhow, this return to the I chord often happens at the end of the second part–what I call a resolved modulation. If it doesn't, it's an unresolved modulation. This doesn't really matter until the end of the tune, where a sense of closure is begged for. A tune with an unresolved modulation must be ended after its first part, so as to end on the I chord. *Anne-Marie Reel* (V4 N2) is a prime example. (Why heck, I remember ending *Anne-Marie Reel* on the B part one night at a roadhouse in Texas and having a drunken angry mob follow me home. They wouldn't leave my front yard until I had played the first part.)

Next, let's codgerize *Forky Deer*. One way we flatpickers can represent the old-timey fiddle style is to use a downstroke-heavy pattern (this reflects old-time's often-quarter-and-half-note-note-heavy style), wherein we play a drone or sympathetic note in addition to the melody note. In the version below, the melody note is always geographically higher, so it's picked first, then we sort of slop over to the open string below it, which, in our case, is always tonally compatible (*i.e.*, harmonic). I encourage you to not to take these double stop notes too literally. The idea is to follow the spirit of the style, not the letter. By the way, playing in this style is handy when the tempo is too fast to pick an eighth-note version–a common predicament for us poor flatpickers.

AN OLD-TIMEY VERSION

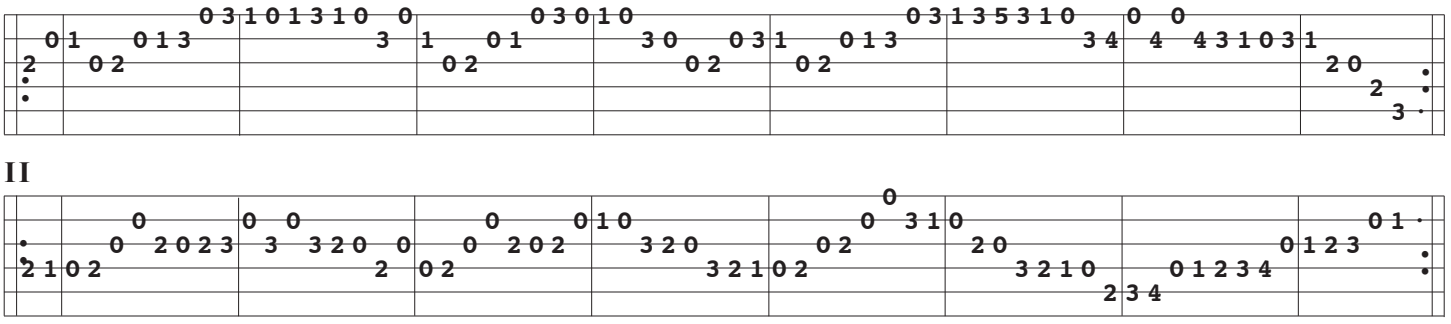


All right, now let's start messing with this tune big time. Below we have a variation, created *via* the classic method of messing around with the tune a bit while maintaining fealty to its original theme. We fill in some rests that used to be there, we get a little jazzy with some of the phrases, and generally just have fun with it.

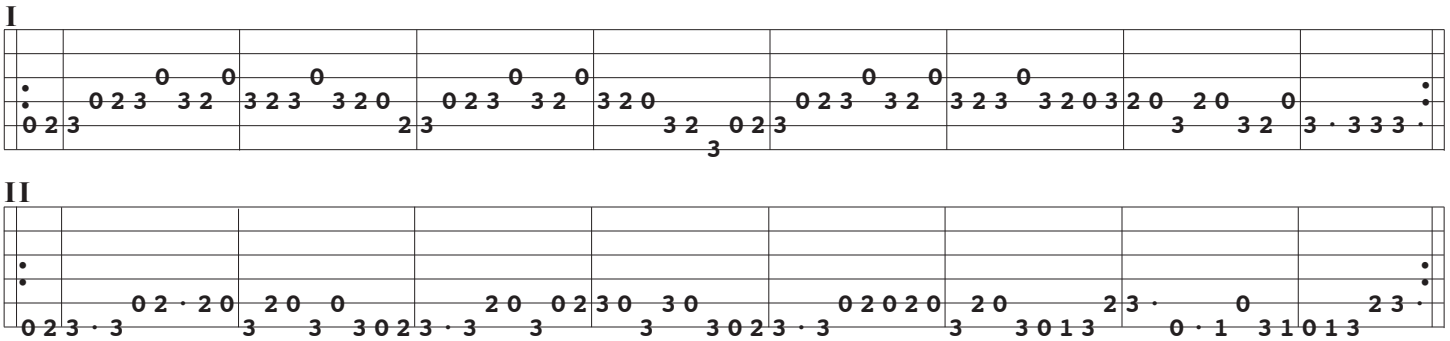
For the last version, we go downstairs. People tend to neglect the basement. They either don't think of playing there, or they aren't familiar or comfortable enough with their first postion scales (V3 N1) to be able to find the melody down there, or they simply don't think the tune will fit. (And in fact, one often has to fudge a little, but generally very minimally. Here, for example, the whole tune fits on the neck except for the last four notes of the second part, where we have to head upward to a C note instead of downward to a C note.)

Note the sixth measure of the first part, wherein we finger the 1-3-5 passage with our first, middle and little fingers. This is where that old chromatic scale training pays off (V2 N1).

VARIATION



LOW-DOWN VERSION



Okay, folks, that's the lowdown from the hoedown. If you still haven't had a sufficient helping of *Forky Deer*, make up your own variations. Compare and contrast the first and third versions shown here, try to take cues from what I've done, and see what you come up with. (If we ever meet, we'll have something to talk about!) Until our paths cross, I remain your humble and obedient servant...

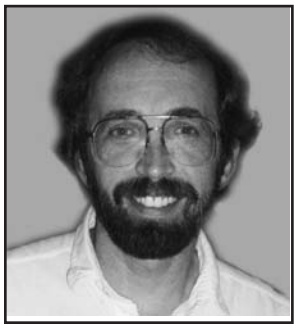
Adam Granger loves driving and hates flying. He likes white interior walls, chocolate and books. He never recognizes any of the subjects of the Playboy Interview or the people on the cover of TV Guide. When he reads the paper he has an increasing sense that this is not a world of his making.

Adam collects miniature slot machines and magazine first issues. His professional life is made up of equal parts of teaching, performing and publishing. He is fifty.

Exploring Bluegrass Guitar

Thinking About Rhythm

by Steve Pottier



I can't begin to tell you how many times I've heard someone say "I can't play any leads but I can play rhythm no problem." This must surely be a case in point of my last column, in which I commented on the newspaper article about incompetent people not knowing they were incompetent. There is a very common misconception that rhythm means just playing the chords to the song in time. Well, yes and no. Playing the chords in time is part of it, and the "time" part of even that simple equation is not at all trivial. But after some 30-odd years of playing, I find that it's much easier to play and teach lead guitar than it is to teach or play rhythm.

Part of it is that it can be pretty subtle—a really good rhythm guitar or bass player might look as if they're doing exactly the same thing (or less) as an OK player. But the difference can be drastic, in just the way they push or pull the beat, and how definite they are with their bass runs. Easier to identify a hot lead player: he's the one doing the acrobatic lead up the neck. Another part may be that the language to describe rhythm is really hazy, sort of like trying to talk about tone. You come up with a concept, then you have to go through all kinds of linguistic gyrations (can I say that in this column?) to make sure that you've communicated exactly what you were thinking about. The things that improve in your (or my) playing are the things you think about and talk about all the time, so the lack of expressive language for rhythm may be part of the reason it isn't a point of focus for many players. Another part may be because rhythm is so contextual and diverse: it depends on the situation you are in. A lead is just easier to pin down.

As a starting point for discussion amongst yourselves, all in the interest of increasing rhythm awareness (first step to avoid incompetence per my last column), I offer the following thoughts:

I personally look at rhythm as having different functions within a bluegrass context:
1) Time Keeping 2) Punctuation 3) Dynamics 4) Texture

These should have an underlying theme of support for what's happening at the time (vocal or lead). They will of course overlap to some degree, but when I think of it this way, it helps to separate out what to work on and how.

1) Time Keeping- here the goal is to maintain the tempo without rushing or dragging the beat. Easiest way to practice is NOT with a metronome(!) but rather with a rhythm machine (like a cheap Casio keyboard) that provides a groove. This is easier to lock into than a straight tick of a metronome. Second choice goes to a metronome with the ability to accent beats. When I use a metronome, I like to play 1 bass/strum per tick. Note that metronomic time is not necessarily the ultimate goal. A metronome has no rhythm, only a steady tempo. As you work on this, try to work toward evenness more than anything—listen first to bass notes, hear that that they come evenly spaced with quality tone and even volume, then switch your attention to the strum, listening for even spacing and repeatable quantity of strum. A little practice at this every day goes a long ways!

You can listen to the modern Stanley (an oxymoron?) sound for a good example of this simple but driving rhythm. Also, perhaps better, is Dudley Connell with the Johnson Mt. Boys.

2) Punctuation- Usually, this is what people mean when they say "I want to do more runs." G run is king. Reread Joe Carr's articles in FGM or maybe check out his books. You will want to be pretty advanced in Time Keeping before you use much of this stuff. Use the Lester Flatt G run (2 notes), listen to Lester playing the G run (say, "Pain in my Heart"). Listen to Del McCoury, Jimmy Martin. Listen a bunch with the thought in mind "How many runs, and what kind of runs, do they use in a given song?" Is it more or less than you expected? How about Carter Stanley, Red Allen, Doyle Lawson, Edd Mayfield, Jack Cook?

With punctuation, you are trying to make a statement, to fill a "hole," and to give everyone a definite note that says "here is the beat." If you play this weakly, it is counterproductive. Be prepared to use rest strokes. A second use of punctuation is to help define the chord progression. Simple runs define where the chord change will take place, when the chorus of a song is coming, or where a new break begins. It helps if you are pretty consistent here with the kinds of runs you use, and where you put them. Defining the chord progression can help a lead player who got too far out on a limb, or help in those nebulous areas when no one knows exactly where to start the break.

3) Dynamics- This separates the great bands from the merely good bands. Listen to Lester Flatt for the way he comes in and out. Listen to Tony Rice or Del McCoury for the way they are real quiet when they sing, and pound the volume in the holes. Use Dynamics for drama (note full application of the Dairy Theory, see my column FGM V3N1). This is a place where jamming can be infinitely better—sometimes laying out is the most tasteful thing you can do in a jam. This is where your ears help you make great music. This one is hard to practice out of context, so listen to a lot of F&S, JD Crowe, BG Album Band and Del McCoury. Try to memorize how it feels when they go from quiet to loud, how they fill gaps. Then try to apply it in the setting you play in. Even exaggerate it at first.

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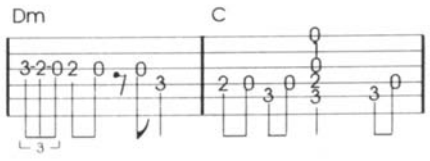

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4) Texture- This is when you start adding stuff like little Doc Watson runs, slides, syncopation, and counterpoint melodies. Very fun, but easy to throw someone off who's trying to sing or play lead, or to just blow the rhythm entirely. Clarence White and Tony Rice, as well as Doc, are masters of this facet of rhythm. As you can see, it's heady company. I feel like I can do this more with a band that I play with all the time, and people who know how the arrangement goes, are comfortable with the mix, etc. In a jam, I'd revert to more basic stuff that people can depend on and are used to hearing. I think you would hear the same from Clarence or Tony until they got a feel for the players involved. Again, this is a hard one to practice. My advice is to add texturing to your bag of tricks in a simple and gradual way. Very simple hammers, slides, and runs sound like more because they aren't the main feature, just a little sound in the background.

If you're in a band, listen to some classic recordings, focussing on a single instrument at a time to see what they are doing. That is, everyone would focus on say, just the bass. Listen for runs, volume changes, slaps, syncopation, how they play the beat. Then do the same for guitar, mandolin, banjo and fiddle. Doing this exercise together and discussing what you hear is a way to tighten your own sound (whether or not you actually adopt the techniques you hear!) It's a way to keep you thinking in a like mind, which is extremely important tok a tight sound.

Finally, and most important for me, is that I find rhythm playing VERY contextual, and what I play depends on the players, how many players, what instrument is taking the lead, how the sound system is working (or not), the visual clues I get from watching the musicians move in rhythm on stage (do they feel comfortable or uptight, how are they feeling the tempo), does the song need a push or to be held back? I try to keep listening, and watching the great players, try to ask them about rhythm whenever I can. I almost always find they have some new insight for me.

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John McGann's Eclectic Acoustic

The Long Campaign

Here's a great tune I learned from fiddler Ruthie Dornfeld. I believe it is a recently composed tune, due to the shifts in accidentals (note the key signature of D, with lots of C naturals and G#s!). As usual, the chords indicated are just a guideline. I suggest you experiment with different positions and slurs, which will allow you to express the tune the way you feel it.

John McGann (www.johnmcgann.com) is a Boston based former National Mandolin Champion currently performing with Rust Farm, Matt Glaser and Wayfaring Strangers, Joe Derrane, Seamus Connolly and others. Rust Farm's new CD Snows of March, *produced by Tim O'Brien, is now available at www.rustfarm.com.*

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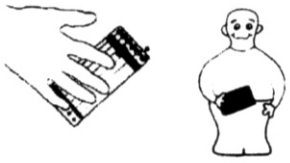

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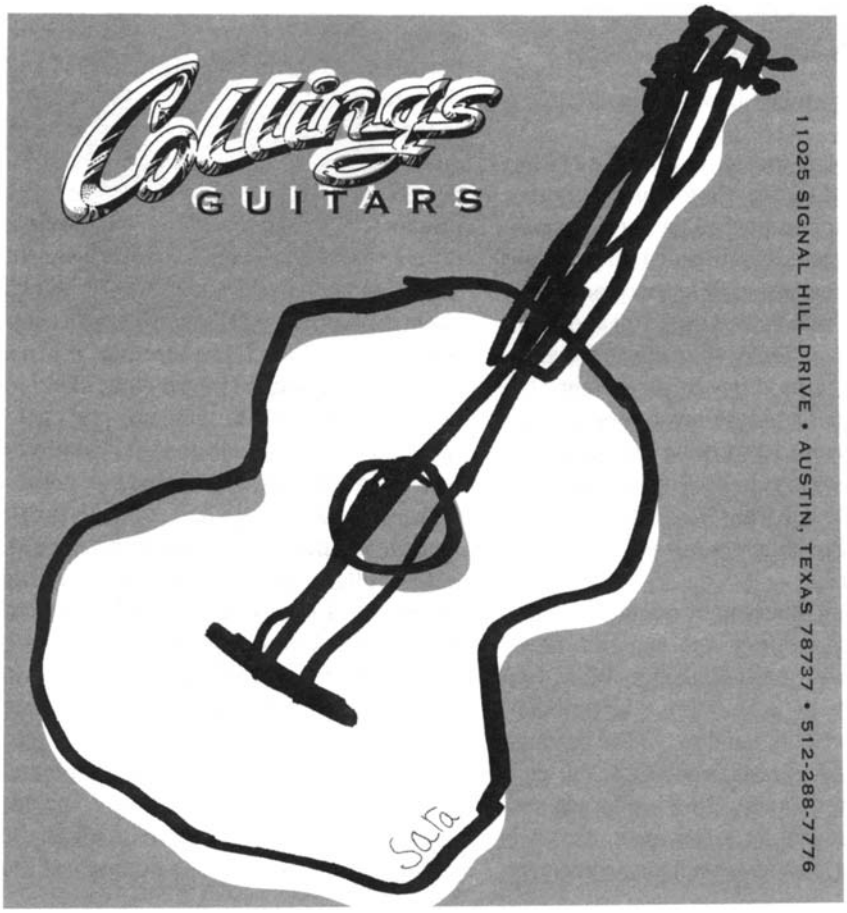

The Long Campaign

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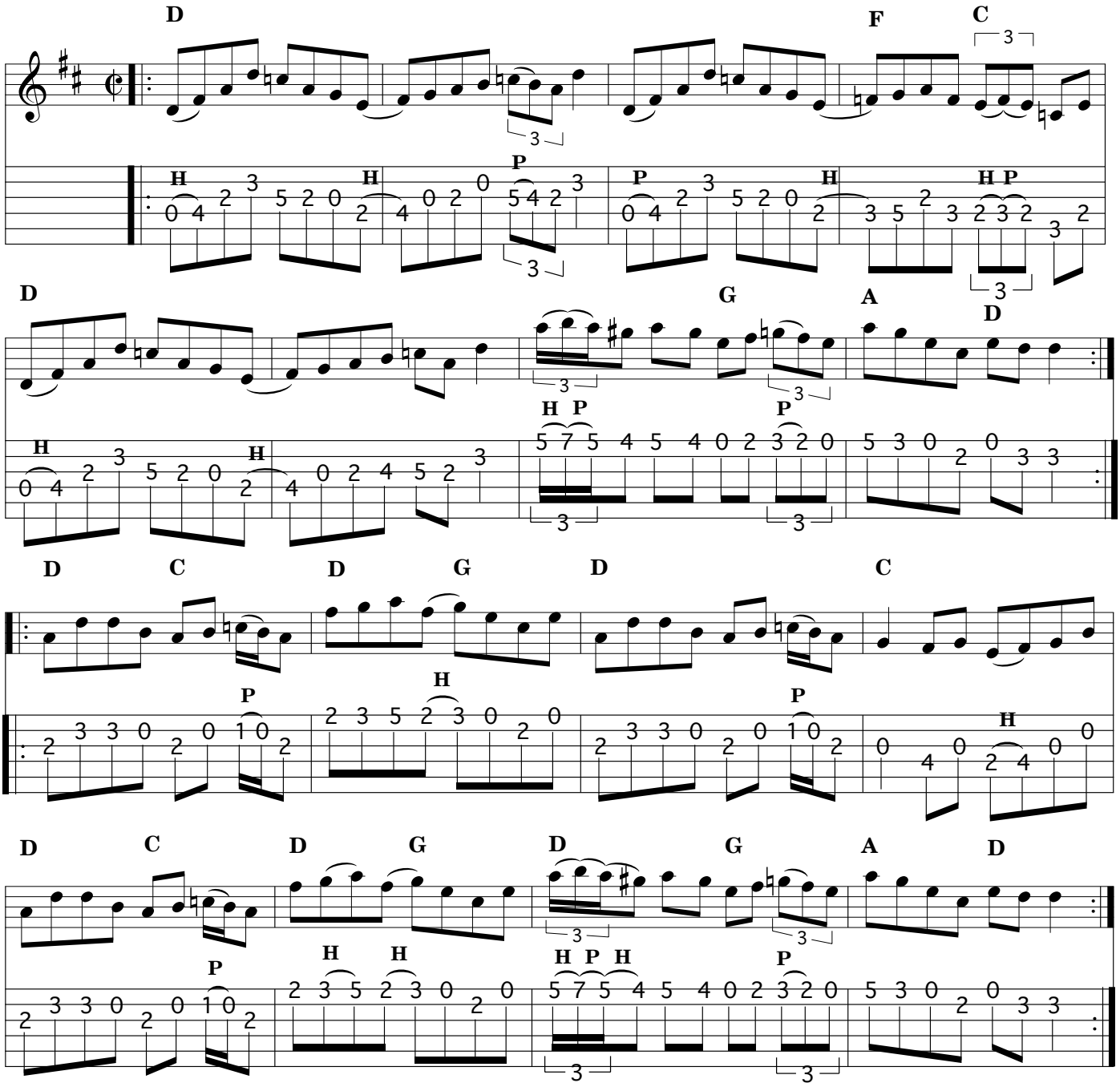
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New Release Highlight

Robert Shafer: *Swingin' Appalachian Style*

by Bryan Kimsey

Robert Shafer keeps a relatively low profile among flatpickers. Winfield regulars sure enough know who he is, but I bet many readers are scratching their heads right now thinking "Robert?…hmmm….". Let me tell you about the guy. First, he's a Winfield Flatpicking champ from 1983 and as such is featured in the Mel Bay *Winfield Winners* book. He was a friend of the late fiddler Randy Howard and the legendary Telecaster player, Danny Gatton. He's just released a great CD (reviewed below) *Swingin'- Appalachian Style* which features him and Randy ripping it up on a bunch of great tunes. In addition to his flatpicking side, Robert's also making a name for himself as a Telecaster player and has a super CD featuring him chicken pickin' and bending strings (*Hillbilly Fever*, Upstart 028).

I always find it interesting to listen to flatpickers who double on the twisted sister electric guitar. Do they use the same style on both instruments or do the keep them separate? Robert says he definitely tries to keep them separate in approach, and I certainly hear a big difference in styles. In fact, it sounds like two different people. Robert says, though, that things from both instruments carry over. "Playing electric really opened up the fingerboard for me and that translated back to the acoustic guitar. I feel a lot more comfortable playing on the neck now." It's interesting to note that Robert got started playing electric guitar in the mid-80s, *after* winning the National Championship. If you thought he was good enough to win the championship, imagine what his playing is like now that he's "comfortable" with the guitar neck!

Although he did contests in the early 80s, Shafer says he doesn't play them very much now (he did come out of the woodwork, though, to take second place in this year's Merlefest guitar contest). He says "I'm much more into just playing now. Improvising and coming up with ideas on the spot. The country bands that I play in are pretty spontaneous and there's a lot of improvising going on there." Robert also mentioned improvising when we discussed

lessons, "It's really difficult to slow things down sometimes. I'll play through a tune up to speed and then when it's time to slow it down, I either can't do it or I'll add things that weren't there when it was up to speed. I really feel that a tune is played differently depending on its speed."

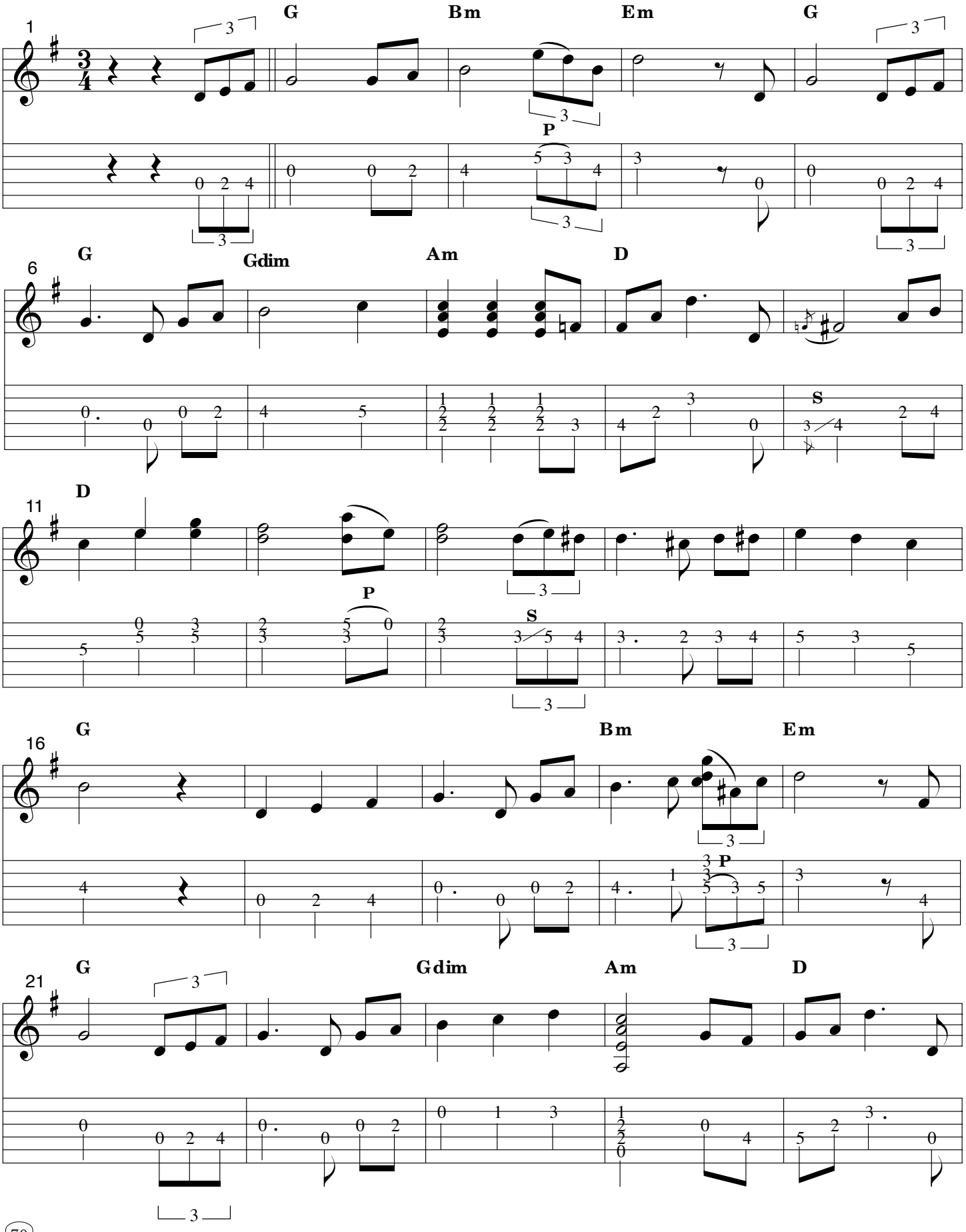
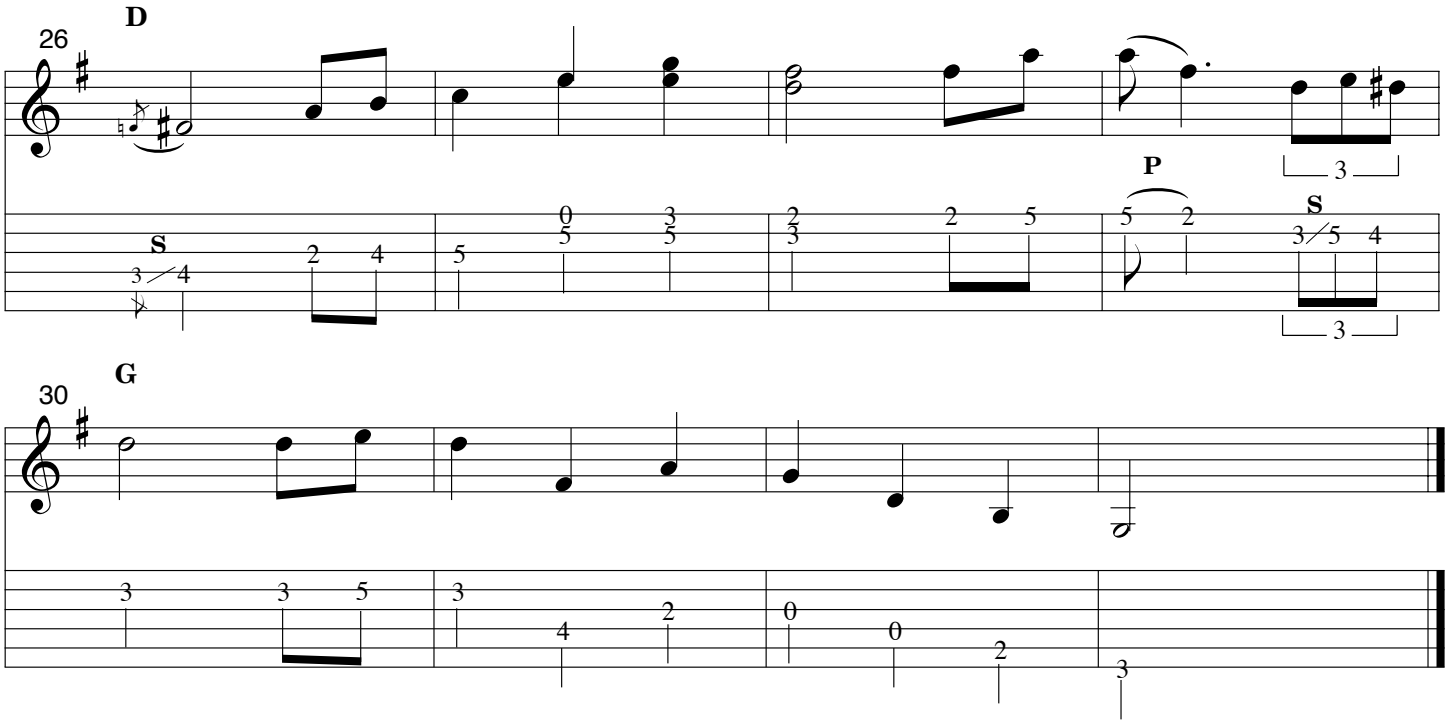
Today, Shafer plays a combination of electric and acoustic gigs, with the acoustic usually plugged-in. "I use a pickup and microphone combination, with the signal going straight to the board for mixing." He primarily uses a Gallagher 72 Special cutaway model. "It has a medium action, but I'm thinking about dropping it down a little." Second place at Merlefest was good for a Taylor 410CE with on-board Fishman Prefix system and Robert says he thinks this guitar will work well for the times when he has to plug in. For strings, he says "I use a medium light gauge, but I'm not real picky about the gauge."

Shafer's latest album is the aptly named *Swingin' Appalachian Style* and features not only himself but the late Randy Howard on fiddle. As you might suppose from the title, this CD is full of swing tunes rather than straight-ahead bluegrass. It kicks off with two peppy numbers: "Sally Johnson" and "Little Rock Getaway" which will certainly get your attention. What caught my ear, though, were the slower tunes like "Tammy," "Westphalia Waltz," (transcribed on the next page) and "Estellita." These are tunes with beautiful melodies. A lesser player would overpower them with too many notes, but Shafer is a pro at this game. In his hands, these songs blossom.

True swing is well represented by "When I Grow Too Old To Dream" and "Back Home in Indiana." Fiddle tunes aren't neglected either with "Turkey in the Straw," "Sally Ann," and "Snowflake Reel" fitting into that genre. Guitar players will find a lot to like here. It's hard to find any fault in an album with great tunes, great tone, and great taste. And, Shafer's got himself a fine fiddler in Randy Howard. As the word spread upon Howard's passing last year, many flatpickers asked "Where can I hear him?" I recommend this CD as a good starting point. Also guesting on *Swingin'* are Alan Freeman on dulcimer, Bobby Taylor on fiddle, and Mark Payne on banjo. Holding down the rhythm chores are Troy Herdman and Darel Meadows on guitar and John Thornton on bass. These guys cook. Equally important, the CD sounds good. It's well mixed, the instruments' levels are good, and the guitar sounds like a guitar should sound. A great CD.

I'm pretty sure that our fearless editor, Dan Miller, never reads my articles, so I'll take this opportunity to sneak in a quick word in support of Shafer's "other" album: *Hillbilly Fever*. This is Telecaster heaven, with Shafer giving his Barden-ized Tele a good workout. He screams, stings, and twangs his way through a cool selection of tunes with titles like "Scotty Moore, Beam Me Up" and "I Want a Lavendar Cadillac."As with *Swingin'* there's a great backup section here, featuring the vocals of Don Dixon. Good stuff, if, in the words of Red Knuckles (and The Trailblazers!), "you like that kind of music."

Westphalia Waltz

Arranged by Robert Shafer
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Westphalia Waltz (con't)

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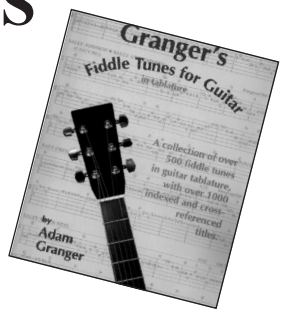
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Reviews

CD Reviews

Dan Tyminski
Carry Me Across The Mountain
Doobie Shea DS-CD-2002

Reviewed by David McCarty

Dan Tyminski has been one of the leading lights of modern bluegrass for more than a decade. This exceptionally talented musician plays great guitar and mandolin, sings lead and harmony vocals, and writes great tunes as well. Those abundant musical gifts made him an integral member of Alison Krauss' touring and recording band, Union Station, and have made him one of the most popular guest artists in bluegrass today.

Now he's released his first CD under his own name, and it's everything we've come to expect from such a gifted performer. The title tune recreates Union Station, featuring Krauss on fiddle and backup vocals, Ron Block on banjo, Adam Steffey on mandolin, Barry Bales on bass, Jerry Douglas on Dobro and Tyminski on guitar and lead vocals. A slightly different ensemble follows on "Stuck In The Middle Of Nowhere," with Aubrey Haynie in on fiddle and Jim Mills on banjo.

A talented and effective flatpicker, Tyminski deftly shows his chops on the one instrumental here, his own original "Green Fees," but there're many other great moments for fans of his guitar work. "Sunny Side of the Mountain" features his immaculate rhythm guitar work, for example, wringing huge, fat Jimmy Martin-like bluegrass power chords from his Dreadnought. Dan's not a player who tries to overpower the instrument or overwhelm the listener with a flurry of pointless hot licks. Like B.B. King in blues and Miles Davis in jazz, Tyminski makes careful, emotional use of the right note at the right time. For fans of subtle, lyrical lead guitar and powerful, yet understated rhythm guitar, this CD will be a delight.

And overall, *Carry Me Across The Mountain* succeeds on all levels. The song choices, with the exception of Ronnie Bowman's mawkishly sentimental "Please Dear Mommy," are uniformly strong. Tony Rice makes a characteristically brilliant guest appearance on the gospel tune "Praise The Lord," and throughout the CD there's a great wealth of strong playing and great singing. If Tyminski gets the notion to lead his own group, this CD ought to be a strong predictor of big success commercially and musically. Recommended!

Song List: Carry Me Across The Mountain; Stuck In The Middle Of Nowhere; I Dreamed Of An Old Love Affair; Green Fees; Think About You Every Day; Praise The Lord; Tiny Broken Heart; Please Dear Mommy; Be Assured; Faith Is A Mystery; Sunny Side of the Mountain

Knee Deep In The Bluegrass
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Tony Trischka • Dan Tyminski • Scott Vestal • Pete Wernick
Rob Ickes & Tim Stafford of Blue Highway

Reviewed by David McCarty

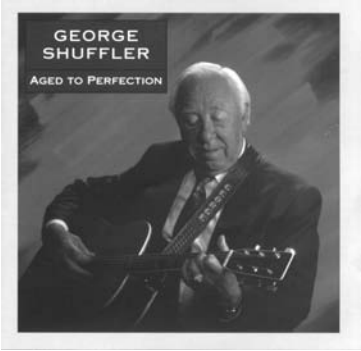
John Lawless of AcuTab Publications has been producing the highest-quality bluegrass instructional materials for several years now, and the list of artists he's featured in this superb series of dead-accurate transcription books reads like the year 2020 inductees into the Bluegrass Hall of Fame. So now, just because it seemed like such a good idea, he's assembled almost the entire cast of characters from the transcription books in the studio to create a one-of-a-kind summit meeting where the modern kings of bluegrass can stretch out and enjoy each other's musical company. And we get to go along for the ride!

And so we get such gems as Tim Stafford and Kenny Smith floating through an almost ethereal "Angeline the Baker" recorded in such perfect detail that we get to hear how well Stafford polished his pick before the session and the sound of the luminous overtones ascending from Kenny's "Frankenstein" Washburn. Mandolin maniacs will drool (careful, you might be mistaken for a banjo player!) over the triple mando-delights of "Carter's Blues" and "Golden Slippers" featuring Butch Baldassari, Wayne Benson and Alan Bibey, with Tim Stafford tossed in like sprinkles on a sundae.

Stafford, in fact, shines through this whole project, playing great rhythm guitar on many tracks and even singing lead on the outlaw ballad, "Pretty Boy Floyd." As anyone's who has taken a workshop with Tim or seen him in concert with his superb group, Blue Highway, knows, this is one of the most polished, professional and entertaining flatpickers playing today. His jaw-dropping break on Scott Vestal's progressive bluegrass "By Stealth" is a modern model of flatpicking creativity and intensity. Hey John, how about a tab of this one? Kenny Smith also displays the musical skills that have won him IBMA's Guitarist of the Year award on "Lonesome Wind" with Ronnie Bowman, Sammy Shelor, Dan Tyminski, Adam Steffey, Ron Stewart and Barry Bales.

Knee Deep In The Bluegrass does a lot more than give fans the chance to hear their AcuTab heroes playing together for the first time, it's a chance for some of the top musicians in bluegrass to play with other great players they'd never have the chance to record with otherwise. Kudos to John Lawless and AcuTab for the great concept and the skill and dedication needed to pull it off. This will no doubt be nominated for "Best Recording Event" at IBMA this year. Hear it now before it becomes famous.

Aged To Perfection
George Shuffler
Copper Creek CCCD-0172



Reviewed by Larry Robinson

The song list of George Shuffler's *Aged To Perfection* CD on the Copper Creek label reads like a page from the "Crosspicker's Primer." Here are a dozen songs in the style developed by Shuffler during his long tenure with The Stanley Brothers.

This project features George Shuffler on that wonderful 1980's Martin D-45. He also dubbed in the bass tracks. This is 100% Shuffler, almost as good as having him playing in person! Every note is very distinct and precise, a wonderful recording.

As you listen to "Nine Pound Hammer" or " I Am A Pilgrim" you have to realize what an impact this guitar technique had on the music of the 1960's. This allowed the guitar to move to a lead position in the band, opening the door for future flatpickers.

"Give The World A Sunny Smile" is a Shuffler original. I really like his treatment of the Leon Jackson classic "Love Come Home." Pick along with the Elizabeth Cotton masterpiece, "Freight Train", or the Bill Monroe creation "It's Mighty Dark To Travel." This isn't just a listening album, it's a learning experience!

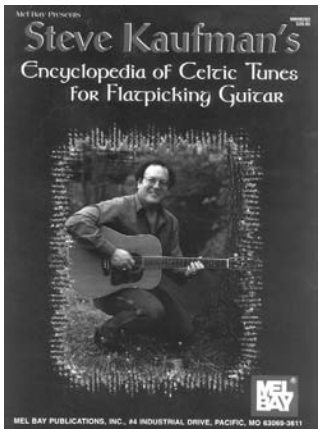
(If you want to read more about the development of Shuffler's style you'll find an in-depth article along with some tablature in the September/October, 1997 issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*.)

This CD is an essential addition to the musical education everyone interested in acoustic guitar styles. Highly recommended!

Song List: Nine Pound Hammer, Give The World A Sunny Smile, Love Please Come Home, Down In The Willow Garden, I Am A Pilgrim, My Home's Across The Blue Ridge Mountains, Freight Train, It's Mighty Dark To Travel, Miller's Cave, Sweet Sunny South, Little Joe, What A Friend We Have In Jesus.

Instructional Book Reviews

Steve Kaufman's Encyclopedia of Celtic Tunes for Flatpicking Guitar
Mel Bay Publications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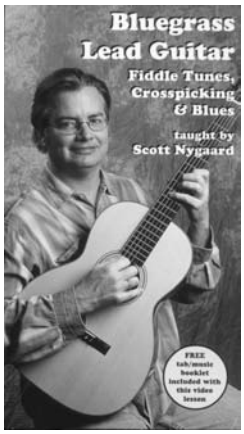
Reviewed by David Moultrup

Following in the tradition of a good job well done by Steve on his other projects, this compendium of Celtic tunes is a fine resource for the picker who wants to reference tunes from across the pond. Given in both standard music notation and standard tab, the tunes are easy to read, which, hopefully, will make them easier to learn.

Anytime somebody digs into a traditional repertoire like this, there are endless possibilities for differences in names for tunes and interpretations of melodies. This, obviously, can create a potential problem for two pickers who each play a different melody for the same tune title. There are a few examples of this in the book which may be recognized by the avid celtic expert. But for the most part, Steve has done a good job of being true to the most common melodies, and true to the most commonly played key signatures.

Instructional Video Reviews

Bluegrass Lead Guitar
by Scott Nygaard
Stefan Grossman's
Gutiar Workshop



Reviewed by David Moultrup

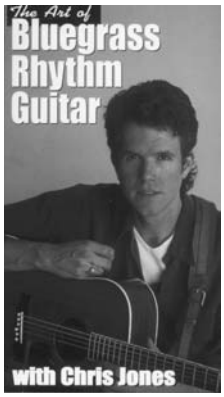
Scott Nygaard creates the sense of a private lesson in this warm and engaging video. It's easy to imagine sitting with Scott in a small teaching cubby, with him patiently and clearly inducting the student into the magic of bluegrass lead guitar. As the video progresses, it becomes more clear that there are many lessons to be had, and that the student will need to return several times to absorb all of the music.

One of the central themes of learning that Scott uses is indispensable to every aspiring guitarist. The notion of transferring musical approaches from other instruments onto the guitar is one of the cornerstones for improvisation. While guitarists have been known to "cop licks" from instruments ranging from dobro, to pedal steel and saxophone, in this video Nygaard sticks to the high lonesome territory. The three most obvious influences in bluegrass are, of course, the fiddle, banjo, and mandolin. Scott takes several tunes, including "Little Billy Wilson," "Home Sweet Home," "Trouble in Mind," and "East Virginia Blues," and develops guitar solos that show the influences of these other instruments. He also speaks to the most basic of all influences in music, the influence of vocal phrasing on guitar solos.

This video will be most useful to beginning through intermediate players who are comfortable with chords, rhythm playing, and some movement around the guitar

neck. The songs become progressively more challenging, but at every step of the way Scott is clear, patient, and a very comfortable teacher. He succeeds in breaking complex solos down to manageable sections, offering the student the opportunity truly learn some fine solos, and in doing so to establish a firm foundation in bluegrass lead playing.

The Art of Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar
by Chris Jones
Musician's Workshop



Reviewed by Dan Dingeldein

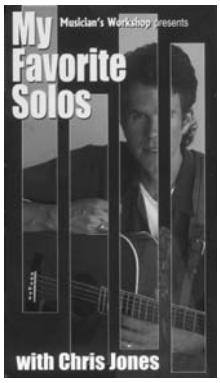
Chris Jones delivers a very informative video in his *The Art of Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar*. This tape is a must have for any serious bluegrass player. Chris expertly breaks down the techniques of playing rhythm, from basic through advanced, as well as teaches the tools that show you how, what, and when to play.

Chris starts with the basics—how to hold a pick: position, pressure and attack and basic rhythm technique. He then talks about right hand position and demonstrates numerous rhythm techniques that will take you beyond the basic "boom-chick," including the important, and often overlooked, topic of dynamics. Addtionally, he talks about using chord inversions, demonstrates "sock" rhythm, teaches a variety of bass runs, discusses the use of G-runs, and outlines stylistic rhythm techniques used by such great rhythm players as Jimmy Martin, Lester Flatt, and Tony Rice.

Throughout the tape Chris demonstrates each technique and rhythmic style by providing specific examples for both vocal and instrumental tunes. He gives examples of back-up techniques that work with a variety of songs such as ultra-fast, very slow, waltz time, country, and contemporary bluegrass. He talks about where each technique might work well within the context of certain types of tunes and gives valuable tips on note placement, tone, timing, and feel.

This tape can only help to advance your rhythm playing whether you are a beginner or an advanced player. *The Art of Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar* will definitely make you more consistent in your rhythm playing and give you a greater awareness of the rhythmic techniques that are available to you beyond the basic "boom-chick" rhythm style.

My Favorite Solos
by Chris Jones
Musicians Workshop



Reviewed by Dan Dingeldein

Here is a tape that gets into the mind of Chris Jones. This video is for solid Chris Jones fans as it presents some of Chris's favorite solos and breaks them down one at a time. The songs that are covered are "B.R.N. Breakdown," "A Few More Years," "Dark Wind of Missouri," "John Henry," "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," "Nashville Blues," "Not that Good at Goodbye," "Ready if You're Willing," "Stream of Love," and "Uphill Climb."

Chris starts by playing and singing a verse and a chorus of each song while being accompanied by his wife, Sally. The songs are first played up to speed and then the break is played again slowed down. Then finally Chris takes each solo and breaks them down and really covers the licks and techniques that he uses to form the breaks.

The licks that a guitar player can pick up off this video are too numerous to mention. If you're always looking for new licks to incorporate into your playing this is a great video to add to your library, especially if you are a fan of Chris Jones' music.

Easy Gospel Solos
with Dan Huckabee
Musician's Workshop

by David Moultrup

Learning music can be an intimidating process. There are times when gentle support, and very basic, straightforward instruction are just what the doctor ordered. If that's what you're looking for, and if you are starting from almost no musical background, then this video may be for you. The important thing to know about this lesson is that when the title says "easy," it means *real* easy.

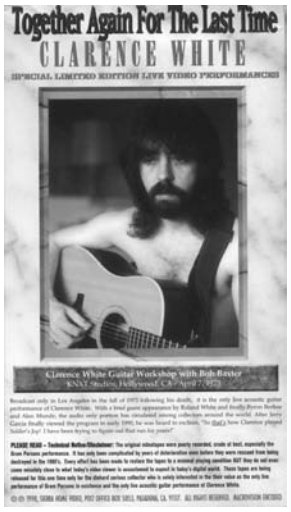
The solos, clearly, are aimed at someone who is not only a raw beginner on the guitar, but probably a total beginner to music. By and large, the melodies taught offer almost no ornamentation. The description on the jacket succinctly describes the four steps used with each song, including: the teacher playing at normal speed, then slowly, then each phrase, then noting potential problems in each phrase.

The style of engagement of the student is in keeping with the steady adherence to the steps of teaching. Slow and even reading of a script by the teacher is characterized by the use of the "royal we," as in, "We now put our pinky here." Each tune goes through the same sequence, demonstrating no pressure on the student to generalize learning.

Because of it's style and content, this video will not be right for all beginners. Many people will need a different approach to learning. But as they say, "that's what makes for horse races." This video just might be someone's first baby step into the world of flatpicking.

Performance/ Instructional Video Review

Together Again For The Last Time
Clarence White/Gram Parsons
Sierra Home Video



Reviewed by Joel Stein

Together Again For The Last Time from Sierra brings together different sets from two great and influential artists, Clarence White and Gram Parsons. Both moved in the same circles, played with many of the same people—most notably the Byrds—and sadly, both died before their time. Originally released as a limited edition video, with numbered foil wrapping, *Together Again* is now available in wider distribution.

Of primary importance to readers of this magazine, the White segment that kicks off the tape is taken from an instructional television show hosted by Bob Baxter. Taped in April, the program first aired in the months following White's death in 1973. As this was long before the advent of home video, audio tapes of the program were traded among White's fans lucky enough to have caught the program in the first place.

While Baxter's show was intended as an instructional vehicle—there is a studio audience with all participants dutifully cradling instruments—this program is more of a primer type discussion on elements of White's style. Instructional techniques such as slow motion or split screens didn't really exist yet.

Baxter exudes a goofy charm, issuing a challenge to make White laugh. White maintains a stoic presence with a droll wit answering questions with clipped monosyllabic answers. To those familiar with Kentucky Colonel bootleg tapes, it's a familiar theme.

Baxter breaks the ice by asking if White sleeps in the nude. Answer: Yes. The two then intersperse some great playing with a cursory analysis of White's combining finger picking with flatpicking in the tune "Listen To The Mockingbird." It is a style that White developed later in his career—coinciding with his use of electric guitar. White offers a run with, and without, using his fingers showing the speed he picked up by using his extra digits.

A brief discussion of White's crosspicking technique offers a close up of his hands while he moves with a marked economy of motion along the strings. Another discussion is offered on White's use of syncopation. Oddly enough, the word syncopation is never used. But we are left with a line from White that is certainly worth the price of admission alone. When Baxter talks about White's phrasing resembling a singers and seeming being "off beat" White responds with the classic "I like to fool with time." White continues to explain that playing straight time always bored him and "playing with time" made playing more interesting.

One revealing bit of conversation centers on fiddle tunes, which Baxter refers to as Doc Watson playing. White admits that he wasn't really influenced by Watson, but more by trying to imitate the notes his father played on fiddle (an interesting side bar: check out the hidden track on the reissued *Byrdmaniax* featuring White and Gene Parsons teaching the elder White the harmonica part to "Green Apple Quickstep").

Baxter asks White about using some of his more subtle techniques in fiddle tunes. White responds that they're too fast and it would "break your fingers." White then goes on to say for fiddle tunes you need to play with more force, as he unleashes a shotgun blast of notes to punctuate the remark.

One of the treats here is actually being able to watch White. His thumb curls over the fret board, his pinky never touches the soundboard as he glides over the strings—these are welcome images. None of the available bootleg videos, or the commercially available episode with the Country Boys on the Andy Griffith show feature such close looks at White's playing. White's limited conversation is interesting as well. When asked, he talks about the recording he was working on at the time, with a band Baxter calls the "Bluegrass Dropouts." Fans of White will recognize the project as the short lived Muleskinner. We also learn that White had only been playing electric guitar for about six years at the time of his death. It's amazing to ponder all that he brought to that instrument in such a short period.

White's playing is, surprise, solid throughout. He and Baxter offer a quick "Wildwood Flower" as an introduction, ""Mockingbird," and "Crawdad" are kept to White and Baxter. Things get interesting when Baxter raves about the classic brother sound—who would argue—as Roland White is brought out, mandolin in hand, and the three tackle "I Am A Pilgrim." Baxter claims that "Pilgrim" sends chills down his spine and admits the thrill of playing it live with the White brothers—again, who would argue? Certainly watching White take a number of turns on "Pilgrim" is a thrill.

To illustrate fiddle tunes, we are treated to an all star band consisting of the White brothers, Byron Berline on fiddle and Alan Munde on banjo. With Baxter proving back, the band kicks into a rousing "Soldier's Joy." The band also offers a snippet of "Sally Goodin" as the closing titles roll.

The Parsons portion of this tape is grainy, poor quality black and white film. Still, watching Parsons, face puffy with alcohol yet still full of boyish and impish charm, front the band is a thrill. Emmylou Harris is perhaps one of the finest harmony singers in the business and watching her this early in her career is a treat. Harris is full of earth mother sexiness as she hits the tambourine and shakes as her harmonies caress Parsons leads. The quality may be terrible but the content is exceptional.

Both these programs leave much to be desired from a technical standpoint if compared to today's standards. The sound quality on both segments is lacking but it is the performance that makes this tape worth owning. Ultimately it's the music that matters—*Together Again For The Last Time* is a welcome document to fans of White's playing—perhaps indefensible. For Parsons fans, this tape is for the obsessed only.

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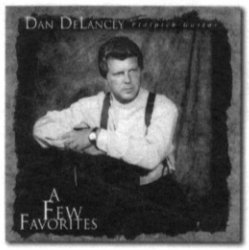

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Instructional Course Review

Advanced Flatpick Guitar
by Russ Barenberg
Homespun Tapes

Reviewed by Dan Miller

In the last issue I reviewed Russ Barenberg's excellent course *Exploring the Fingerboard* and mentioned that, among other things, the course gave your left hand an incredible workout. If you are now ready to put that left hand to the test and give the right hand an equally challenging workout, you should consider ordering Russ' *Advanced Flatpick Guitar* course.

In this course, which comes on six audio cassettes with a tab book, Russ expertly covers a variety of important flatpicking topics. The first tape gets your right hand warmed up with a few straightforward tunes, "Roll On Buddy," "Over the Waterfall," "New Camptown Races," and "Pretty Polly," taught with an emphasis on pick direction. All of the arrangements here are interesting and exciting and could probably be handled by the intermediate player without too much difficulty.

In tape number two, Russ turns his attention to cross-picking. He starts out by demonstrating the technique, talking about the various cross-picking picking patterns and then introduces the technique in song by providing you with an arrangement of "Beaumont Rag." This arrangement demonstrates the standard cross-picking forward roll. In the next tune, "Will You Miss Me," Russ turns up the heat a little by providing you with some forward and backward rolling crosspicking along with some odd jumps in and out of the cross-picking pattern. Having mastered the first two tunes, you are feeling pretty comfortable with your cross-picking technique until the next tune, "Farewell Blues" is presented a la Clarence White syncopation and left hand complications. After that workout, Russ has one more challenge for you as he cranks the cross-picking burner up to full blast. The tune is "Wildwood Flower," but like you have never played it before. Get ready to give that right hand a tremendous challenge with this one.

Tape three focuses on rhythm playing and provides examples of syncopated back-up; syncopated back-up with extra filler notes; Texas "sock" rhythm, including numerous chord charts and examples of how to use them to back up fiddle tunes; and examples of how to use filler notes to embellish a vocal tune, using "Columbus Stockade Blues" for demonstration. These are all important topics in intermediate to advanced rhythm playing and Russ does a great job demonstrating and explaining them. Tape three ends with a presentation of "floating licks" and how to use them in the songs "Live and Let Live," "Willott's Hornpipe," and "Orange Mountain Special." Throughout the course Russ breaks down each tune phrase-by-phrase in meticulous detail.

Tapes four and five cover the topics of fiddle tunes and bluegrass songs, respectively. The tunes presented here are "Rocky Mountain Goat," "Billy In The Lowground," "Timour The Tartar," "Morning Glory," "Bill Cheatham," "Nine Pound Hammer," "Barrel of Fun," "Big Mon," and "Pike County Breakdown." During the presentation of each song, Russ not only teaches his arrangements in detail and discusses all of their technical challenges, but also provides insights into how he approaches these arrangements and how he thinks about the arrangement process regarding each style of tune presented.

In the last tape in this series Russ brings all the techniques and ideas presented thus far in the course together in the presentation of four very challenging arrangements: "Silver Bell," "Sandy Burn Reel," "Shenandoah Valley Breakdown," and "Cedar Hill."

If you are looking for an instructional course that will pull you out of that intermediate level rut you are in and provide you with many left and right hand challenges, I highly recommend this Russ Barenberg course. We now have it on sale through Flatpicking Mercantile for $49.95 up until 1 September. Call 800-413-8296 to order.

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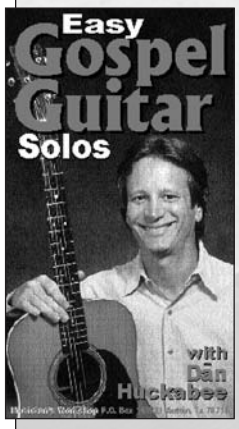

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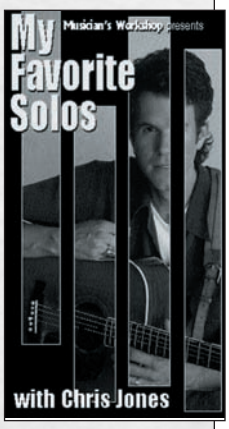

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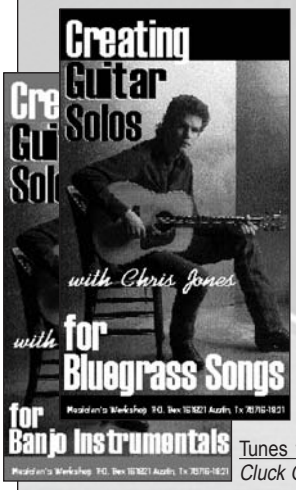

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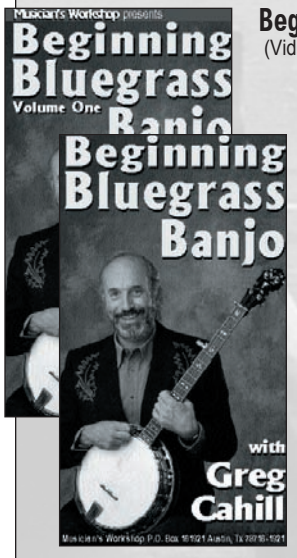

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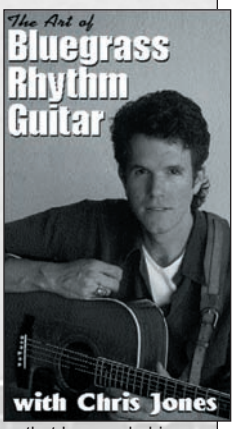

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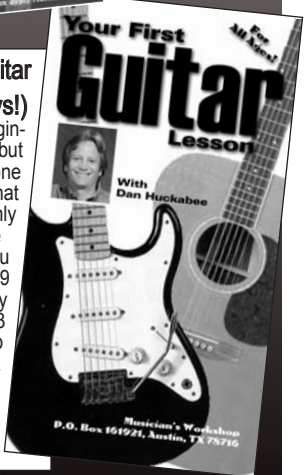

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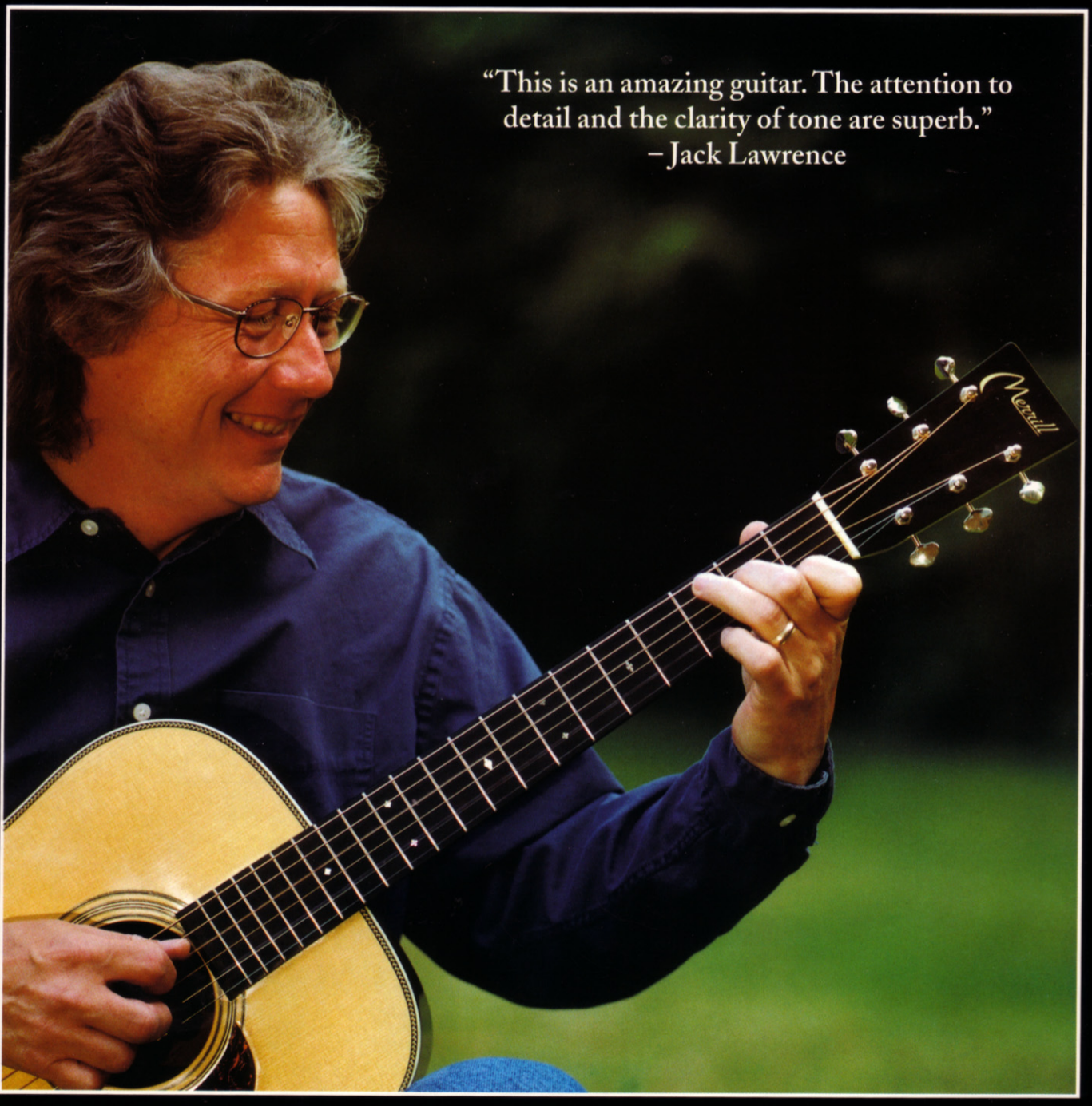

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